

April 13, 2011

Dear Parent/Guardian:

In keeping with our policy of providing information to you, we wanted to give you information about pertussis (whooping cough). Tazewell County Public Schools *has NOT* had any confirmed cases of pertussis at this time.

Pertussis is caused by a bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*. Pertussis is spread through air droplets produced by sneezing or coughing. Pertussis can be prevented with vaccination and can be treated with antibiotics.

In 2009, nearly 17,000 cases of pertussis were reported in the US, but many more go undiagnosed and unreported. Worldwide, there are 30 – 50 million cases of pertussis and about 300,000 deaths per year. Pertussis in adolescents and adults is less severe; however, it is a serious infection for young children and infants. In rare cases, pertussis can result in death in children less than 1 year of age. The most effective way to **prevent** pertussis is through vaccination with DTaP for infants and children and a booster of TDaP for children (usually age 11), teens and adults. As a teen or adult, if you have not had a tetanus vaccine in the past 5 years, please contact your health care provider. Not only can you protect yourself, you can protect any young child you may come in contact with!

The symptoms of pertussis occur in stages. The initial stage begins like a cold, with runny nose, sneezing, mild fever and cough. The cough lasts 1-2 weeks and then worsens. The second stage includes uncontrolled coughing followed by a “whooping” noise when the person breathes in air. During these severe coughing spells, a person may vomit or their lips or face may look blue. Between coughing spells a person may appear well. This stage may last 4-6 weeks.

In the past few years, the numbers of pertussis infections has risen in Virginia. Also, cases of pertussis have been seen in our region.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact your child’s health care provider as well as your health care provider to assure your child and you are properly vaccinated. If you have a child entering the sixth grade in Tazewell County Public Schools, they are required to have a booster or provide medical exemption documentation *prior* to entry. If you or your child experiences the symptoms of pertussis, please seek evaluation by a health care provider.

Thank you,

School Health Services
Tazewell County Public Schools