



August 20, 2012

TO: Educational Service District Superintendents
School District Superintendents
Assistant Superintendents for Business and/or Business Managers
School Building Principals
Directors of Special Education
School Nurse Supervisors

FROM: Randy I. Dorn, State Superintendent of Public Instruction
Mary C. Selecky, Secretary, Washington State Department of Health

RE: Whooping Cough (pertussis)

Our state is in the middle of the worst whooping cough (pertussis) epidemic in 70 years. More than 3,400 cases have been reported so far this year—12 times more than the number of cases reported at this time last year (287).

Whooping cough is highly contagious. It causes cold-like symptoms, spreads by coughing and sneezing, and may last for many weeks. The greatest risk is to babies who suffer more severe symptoms, and who usually get the disease from older children and adults.

Most of the reported cases of whooping cough are in school-age children. That's why schools play a critical role in controlling the spread of this disease. Here are some ways you can help:

- Support your school nurse in monitoring and requiring compliance with immunization laws.
 - Children under age seven need a series of five doses of the whooping cough vaccine called DTaP.
 - Students in grade 6 need a “booster” called Tdap to prevent whooping cough.
- Encourage all school personnel to get a whooping cough “booster” or Tdap shot to protect themselves and everyone else at school.
- Educate parents and your school community on how to prevent the spread of whooping cough. Materials are available on the Washington State Department of Health Whooping Cough Epidemic Web site at www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/WhoopingCough.aspx.
- Share this material with all school staff at orientation meetings at the start of the school year.

Washington has taken steps to control the cost of the vaccine:

- The state buys all recommended vaccines for kids up to age 19 – available through health care providers across the state.
- Most health insurance plans cover the whooping cough vaccine for adults; it's available in health care provider offices and pharmacies.
- The Department of Health bought Tdap vaccine for uninsured and underinsured adults. Local health agencies have information about where this vaccine is available in your community.
- Note, while there's no-cost for the vaccines purchased by the state, health care providers may charge for an office visit or to administer the vaccine. People who can't afford the fees can ask the provider to waive the cost.

Thank you for your support of a healthy Washington during this epidemic. Working together, we can keep our communities safe from diseases that vaccines can prevent.

Sincerely,



Randy I. Dorn
State Superintendent
of Public Instruction



Mary C. Selecky, Secretary
Washington State Department of Health