Dear Parent

Re: Whooping Cough (Pertussis)

Recently there has been a case of whooping cough in a person associated with the school. Whooping cough is a highly infectious illness that is spread by coughing and sneezing. The illness is troublesome and distressing at any age but can be very serious in young infants.

Protection against whooping cough is included in the routine vaccinations given to children at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, and 4 years. Adolescents are provided with a free pertussis booster vaccine in Year 10 or at the age of fifteen years from their doctor or local council clinic. If your children have missed any of these routine vaccinations they can still be vaccinated against whooping cough.

A pertussis vaccine is also available from a general practitioner for any adults living in the household of children under six months of age (or regularly caring for these children). This vaccine is not currently funded. Women who are in their third trimester of pregnancy (from 28 weeks) and have not received a pertussis containing vaccine in the last five years are eligible for a free whooping cough vaccine. Please speak to your doctor to discuss having this vaccine.

Vaccination gives good protection to young children, but unfortunately this protection does wane with time. Whooping cough may still occur in older children and adults who were fully immunised in early childhood. Early diagnosis and treatment of this illness is important to limit the spread of whooping cough in the community. If the illness is detected early in its course, treatment will reduce the period of infectivity for other people.

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that all cases of whooping cough are excluded from school for a period of twenty-one days after the onset of their illness or until they have received five days of a course of appropriate antibiotics.

I have enclosed a fact sheet on whooping cough for your information. Please contact your local doctor or the Public Health Unit if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Kari Jarvinen
Public Health Medical Officer
17 February 2015