

County of Santa Clara

Public Health Department

Health Officer
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San José, CA 95126
408.792.5040



August 18, 2010

Dear School Employee,

As the Health Officer for Santa Clara County, I would like to provide you with the latest information regarding the current whooping cough (pertussis) epidemic in California.

According to the California Department of Public Health, whooping cough has reached epidemic levels in California. As of August 11, more than 2,700 cases have been reported statewide including seven infant deaths. That is a six-fold increase over the same period last year, when 392 cases were reported.

Currently in Santa Clara County, we are also experiencing a dramatic spike in cases. Since January, there have been 124 whooping cough cases reported with about half of those occurring in the month of July. In comparison, in 2009 there were 25 cases the entire year. Fortunately, no whooping cough-related deaths have been reported in Santa Clara County so far this year.

Whooping cough can cause serious illness but infants are especially at risk of severe illness and even death. This vaccine-preventable disease is caused by a type of bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis* and is spread by coughing or sneezing while in close contact with others, who then breathe in the pertussis bacteria.

Symptoms usually start out like the common cold with a runny nose or congestion, sneezing and possibly a mild cough or fever. After 1-2 weeks, there are bursts or attacks of severe coughing. At the end of each cough, there can be a high-pitched "whoop" sound. These coughing fits are very dangerous to infants and small children and make it difficult for them to breathe. Please note that not everyone with whooping cough will have a cough with a "whoop" sound. During this epidemic, anyone with cough symptoms of greater than two weeks should contact their health care provider.

Because early symptoms start out like the common cold and flu season is around the corner, it is very important we continue to exercise good personal hygiene and encourage practices in classrooms and common areas to help prevent the spread of disease. For children showing signs and symptoms of whooping cough, please follow your current policies and procedures for sick children at your school. This should include sending students with fever or worsening coughs home.

Because whooping cough is usually not confirmed in a person until they have been coughing for weeks, we cannot easily prevent further spread of the disease. The best way to stop this epidemic is to get as many people vaccinated as possible. The vaccine used for children up to 6 years of age is called DTaP. Because the vaccine wears off with time, young people and adults should also get a shot for whooping cough. The name of the vaccine for young people and adults is Tdap.

For more information on whooping cough, visit www.sccphd.org/whoopingcough or [click here](#) for school-specific whooping cough materials from the California Department of Public Health.

I hope you have a successful school year and that you and your students stay healthy!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marty Fenstersheib MD". The signature is written in a cursive style.

Marty Fenstersheib, MD, MPH
Health Officer