

Dear Parents, Guardians and Students,

The Indiana State Department of Health and the Indiana Department of Education have asked that school systems provide important information to parents and guardians of students about pertussis (whooping cough) and the vaccines available to prevent this serious illness.

Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*. Pertussis is spread by droplets created when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Infants and young children are usually vaccinated against pertussis, but the vaccine becomes less effective as children get older, and vaccinated children can become infected.

Pertussis causes severe coughing fits that can persist for weeks or months. During a coughing fit, the infected person may be short of breath. The coughing fit may be followed by vomiting and exhaustion. Young infants are at highest risk for developing complications from the disease like pneumonia, seizures, and death.

Teens and adults who received the pertussis vaccine when they were younger might have milder disease if they get sick with pertussis, but they can still spread it to others. The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a pertussis vaccine (Tdap) for all 11-18 year old children. The Tdap vaccine, which protects against tetanus and diphtheria, as well as pertussis, can be given regardless of the time since receiving a regular tetanus booster (Td). CDC also recommends a dose of Tdap vaccine for all adults up to 65 years of age, and for adults 65 and older who have close contact with infants. Adults should talk to their healthcare provider about receiving a Tdap booster.

The Tdap vaccine is required for all students in grades 6 -12. Please talk with your child's healthcare provider about the Tdap vaccine. Additional resources for families to obtain information about pertussis disease include the following websites:

The Indiana State Department of Health

<http://www.in.gov/isdh/files/PertussisQF2011.pdf>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pertussis/default.htm>

Sincerely,
Dr. Steven A. Dillon
Director of Student Services