



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services  
Division of Public Health – Women’s & Children’s Health Section

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Beverly Eaves Perdue, Governor  
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Laura Gerald, MD, MPH  
State Health Director

August 31, 2012

MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendents, Principals, Nurses, and School Personnel of Public, Charter, and Private Schools

FROM: Beth Rowe-West, RN, BSN, Head *Beth Rowe-West*  
Immunization Branch

Carol Tant, Head *Carol Tant*  
Children & Youth Branch

SUBJECT: Pertussis in North Carolina

The purpose of this memo is to make schools aware of the rise in pertussis (whooping cough) across the state and how they can help control the spread of pertussis.

Between January and the end of June, 297 cases of whooping cough have been reported covering 38 counties. Of those cases, 56% are school aged children (6-17 years of age). There were just 137 cases of pertussis reported to the state in all of 2011.

This is not just a concern in North Carolina. The U.S. has seen a spike in pertussis across the country with 16,181 cases reported through July this year. With the constant travel of Americans, we must be protected and prepared to control the spread of disease.

Steps schools can take:

- Schools must be sure that **all** students are up to date with **all** required vaccinations, including DTaP and/or Tdap.
- School personnel must notify, as soon as possible, the parents/guardians of those children who do not meet these minimum health requirements (G.S. 130A-155(a) and 130A-440). Please remember that the law allows parents/guardians of unimmunized or under-immunized children 30 calendar days after the child’s first day of school to obtain immunizations and/or present proof of such.
- Schools should identify and keep a list of any students, faculty, or staff who are at highest risk for contracting pertussis (ex: have exemptions or underlying health conditions).
- Teachers, coaches, and instructors should be aware that pertussis is partially defined as cough illness lasting more than 14 days. Students exhibiting this symptom should be referred to the school nurse for further evaluation.
- Encourage Tdap vaccination for **all** staff (administrators, teachers, custodial staff, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, and volunteers).
- Notify the parents of any children with pertussis symptoms. Ask them to hold children out of school who are symptomatic.
- Resources for all populations can be downloaded and distributed from this CDC website: <http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/pubs-tools/multimedia.html#print-materials>.
- Collaborate with your local health department about pertussis surveillance and response.

Adults can develop whooping cough and often do not know they have the disease or are diagnosed later in the illness. Because adults are diagnosed later, they can spread pertussis to others and not know it. A one-time booster dose of Tdap for anyone age 7 or older helps people stay protected against the disease and is recommended by the CDC.

We all need to pitch in to help control this situation, to reduce the spread of disease, and to protect our most vulnerable populations. Thank you for your support of child health and childhood immunizations.

CC: SMT Regional Immunization Consultants Ann Nichols WCH School Health Nurse Consultants LHDs Zack Moore

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