

7 June 2017

Letter to Schools and Childcare Providers in South Zone

**RE: PERTUSSIS (Whooping Cough) Outbreak Declared in South Zone**

A Pertussis (Whooping cough) outbreak was declared in South Zone on 5 June 2017, with 17 confirmed cases this year, 12 of which were reported this week and which are all linked. It is expected that there is more Pertussis circulating in the community, as many people with the disease may not seek medical attention. Given historical and immunization data, it is predicted that this illness will spread over the next number of months.

**Whooping cough (Pertussis)**

- A highly contagious, bacterial infection of the lungs and airways.
- Pertussis can be a severe – even fatal – illness, particularly in children. In 2012, an infant in Southern Alberta died from Pertussis.
- Children under one year of age are most likely to have serious illness as a result of Pertussis.

**Signs and symptoms**

- Pertussis illness starts with a runny nose, sneezing, fever and mild cough. Typically, over about a week, the cough will become more severe with repetitive coughing spells.
- In younger children, these coughing spells are usually followed by a “whooping” sound when inhaling. Vomiting following a coughing spell is also common.
- Older children and adults may experience milder symptoms, such as a prolonged cough with or without fits or whooping sound.
- The cough may last for two months or longer.

**Why is the disease serious?**

- Complications can include pneumonia, seizures, brain injury and death.
- Children under one year of age are most likely to require hospitalization.
- People with Pertussis are most contagious in the first three weeks after symptoms begin.

**How you can protect your child?**

- 1) Immunization is the best method to protect your child and limit the spread of disease to others. Parents should ensure their children are vaccinated according to Alberta’s Routine Childhood Immunization schedule:  
<http://www.health.alberta.ca/health-info/imm-routine-schedule.html>
- 2) In Southern Alberta, pregnant women in the third trimester (26 weeks) are offered Pertussis containing vaccine to protect mother and child in the first weeks after birth.
- 3) All adults, 18 years of age and older, are recommended to have received one adult dose of Pertussis containing vaccine
- 4) Encourage your child to not share water bottles, lipstick, lip balm, drinks.

Please contact your local Public Health office to review immunization records and/or make an appointment (see the attached list of offices in southern Alberta).

### **Treatment**

- A lab test will only be positive in the first three weeks after the start of symptoms.
- Antibiotics are effective in minimizing the spread of Pertussis to others if given early after you start getting sick, although antibiotics may not change the course of Pertussis disease. Antibiotics will decrease the amount of time that you or your child must stay home.
- **If you or your child is diagnosed with pertussis, stay home from school, work, church, public places and other social settings for 5 days after you have started antibiotics.** If treatment is not started, you must stay home for **21 days** after the start of your symptoms.

### **Contacts of confirmed cases with Pertussis**

- Public health will follow up with contacts of confirmed cases. Antibiotics to prevent infection are only recommended for certain at risk people (infants and pregnant women in their third trimester or their family members), NOT for all contacts.

**Contact your health care provider if you suspect that you or your child has Pertussis.**

For health advice and information, call Health Link Alberta, 24-hours a day, **811**.

Sincerely,

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