



ORANGE COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Rosemary L. Summers, MPH, DrPH Health Director

Richard E. Whitted Human Services Center 300 West Tryon Street Post Office Box 8181 Hillsborough, NC 27278 Phone: (919) 245-2411 Fax: (919) 644-3007 www.co.orange.nc.us/health

Central Administrative Services

Dental Health Services

Environmental Health Services

Health Promotion and Education Services

Personal Health Services

300 West Tryon Street Hillsborough, NC 27278

PH: (919) 245-2400

2501 Homestead Road Chapel Hill, NC 27516

PH: (919) 968-2022

Personal Health Services

November 19, 2008

Dear Estes Hills Parents:

Two students at Estes Hills have been diagnosed with pertussis (whooping cough). One was sick several weeks ago but just diagnosed. The other was confirmed today. The two students are close contacts to each other.

Pertussis is an acute bacterial infection of the respiratory tract that is caused by the organism Bordatella Pertussis. It is transmitted through close contact with an infected person's respiratory droplets. Symptoms of pertussis may begin with cold-like symptoms that progress to include a cough of at least 2 weeks duration. The cough is often characterized as being paroxysmal (multiple coughs following each other closely without time for a breath in between), is often followed by a loud inspiration at the end of the cough which sounds like a "whoop" and may be followed by vomiting. Younger infants may have apneic (no breathing) episodes with this illness. While older children and adults may have milder illness, pertussis can be quite serious in infants and the elderly and often results in hospitalization. Symptoms usually begin 7-10 days after exposure, but can take up to 21 days to appear. The last date that children may have been exposed was November 12th.

Most people have been immunized against pertussis. Children are routinely immunized with DtaP (Diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis) vaccine at ages 2, 4, 6, and 12 months and at 4-5 years of age. A booster dose of Tdap (the vaccine used for adolescents and adults) is now required for students when they enter 6th grade. Though the vaccine is good, it is not 100% effective in preventing pertussis and immunity to pertussis decreases over time as children get older.

Pertussis is treated with antibiotics, usually azithromycin. Though the antibiotic may not shorten the actual illness, it does shorten the period of time that the person is infectious. Persons identified as close contacts to a pertussis case are usually recommended to receive preventative antibiotics to help prevent them from developing the disease if the antibiotics can be given early enough after exposure.

Students who are close contacts (i.e. in the same classroom) to the students may have different recommendations and will receive a different letter. If your child has not received an additional letter, he/she has not been identified as a close contact. You do not need to do anything except to be alert for symptoms of pertussis and have your child see his/her medical provider promptly for evaluation if symptoms occur. If your child's medical provider believes your child to have pertussis, he/she will need to test your child for pertussis and report the illness to the local health department.

There are no other students suspected of having pertussis known to us at this time. However, there have been other cases in surrounding counties in recent weeks.

NC law requires that children receive a booster dose of tetanus/diphtheria/pertussis-containing vaccine (Tdap) before entering 6th grade unless they have had a tetanus-diphtheria vaccine (tetanus shot) within the last 5 years. If your child has not had the tetanus shot within the last 5 years and is already 10 years old or older, we would strongly encourage you to get your child vaccinated with Tdap now to provide additional protection against pertussis. Also, getting the vaccine now will meet the requirements for 6th grade entry and you won't have to have your child vaccinated later. Tdap vaccine is available from either your private medical provider or through the Orange County Health Department. The vaccine is free at the Health Department.

The staff of Estes Hills is working closely with the Health Department to keep parents informed of all recommendations. If your phone information is not current, please update your child's teacher as soon as possible. For more information on pertussis, we recommend that you go to the website for the Centers for Disease Control at www.cdc.gov.

If you have questions or concerns please call either Sue Rankin, RN at 919-968-2022, ext. 275, Judy Butler, RN at 919-245-2425 or your school nurse, Christine Shooter, RN at 919-942-4753.

Rosemary Summers, DrPh, MPH Health Director

Michael Fisher, MD, MPH Medical Director