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The Chester County Health Department has provided us with information about pertussis. Your child may have been in close contact with a person who has pertussis (whooping cough). Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory infection (in the lungs and breathing tubes). It is spread through the air when an infected person sneezes or coughs. Pertussis can live in the body for up to 21 days before coughing starts. Anyone can get sick from pertussis, but it is especially dangerous for babies and people with weakened immune systems. The cough is often worse at night and cough medicines usually do not help the cough.

### **Pertussis Symptoms**

- Pertussis starts with cold-like symptoms and a mild, occasional cough.
- The cough becomes more persistent, causing coughing fits.
- The cough may become violent, causing vomiting, turning blue, or difficulty catching your breath.
- Some people experience a whooping noise, but many do not.
- The cough may last up to 8 weeks or longer.

### **Recommendations**

- If your child has a cough, contact your physician and let them know that your child may have been exposed to a case of pertussis. Please bring this letter with you to the appointment.
- If the doctor suspects pertussis, an antibiotic should be given to your child to help lower the chance of spreading the disease to others, even before lab results are back. Your child will be able to return to school after completing the first 5 days of the medication. It is very important that your child takes the medication until completed, even if he or she feels better.
- If your child is diagnosed with pertussis, everyone who has close contact with him or her should also be treated with antibiotics even if they have been vaccinated.
- Be sure you and your child are fully vaccinated.
  - Children should receive one dose of the DTaP vaccine at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 15-18 months, and at 4-6 years.
  - The Tdap booster is given at age 11.
  - Adults should also receive a Tdap vaccine.
  - Pregnant women should receive a Tdap with each pregnancy, preferably during their third trimester.
  - If you don't know whether you or your child(ren) are fully vaccinated, call your doctor.

The DTaP and Tdap vaccines are available at doctor's offices, health care centers and immunization providers. The Chester County Health Department Clinic offers free vaccine to those who meet eligibility requirements. Contact 610-344-6252 for more information.

Please visit your physician if your child develops any symptoms of pertussis. For more information on pertussis, please go to [www.chesco.org/health](http://www.chesco.org/health).