



24 October 2017

Dear Parent/Caregiver

Re: Whooping Cough health advice – Georgiana Molloy Anglican School

There have been ongoing cases of whooping cough diagnosed in students at GMAS in recent months, with another case in a student today. I write to advise that if your child has developed a coughing illness or if they develop a coughing illness in the next 1-2 weeks, take them to see a doctor as soon as possible, for possible testing and treatment. If your child is well and has no symptoms, there is no need for any further action.

Symptoms of whooping cough can include persistent coughing, breathing difficulties and often coughing to the point of gagging or vomiting. A flu-like illness may come before the coughing stage. Infants and young children may also make a 'whooping' sound during coughing bouts, but this sound does not always occur.

Adolescents and adults can also have the disease with the only symptom being a cough lasting several weeks or months. It is important to have such coughs assessed by a doctor because if one person in the family has whooping cough, it is likely to spread to the rest of the family, including vulnerable young children.

The incubation period for the disease averages 7-10 days, with people infectious from the onset of the first symptom (cold/flu-like illness or cough) to 3 weeks after the onset of coughing. Antibiotic treatment reduces the length of the infectious period if diagnosed early enough.

It is spread to others by droplets from coughing or sneezing. Untreated, a person with whooping cough can spread it to other people for up to three weeks after the onset of cough.

Five full days of antibiotic treatment needs to be completed before they can return to school. Children who have symptoms and who have tested positive, need to stay away from school until 5 days of antibiotics are completed.

Whooping cough is a debilitating disease for young children who are not immunised and can be fatal especially for babies under 6 months of age. Vaccination is the most important way of reducing pertussis risk in our community – *but even fully vaccinated children and adults can still get the disease, although it is usually a milder illness.*

It is important to double check that your child is fully up to date with his or her immunisations against whooping cough (pertussis). Free whooping cough vaccinations are recommended for 2, 4, 6 and 18 month old babies, 3.5 year old children and Year 8 students in high school. People who work with children and babies are also recommended to have a whooping cough booster 10 years after their last whooping cough vaccination.

If you are unsure of your child's vaccination status, please see your doctor or community immunisation provider for information and vaccination if necessary. You can also call the Australian Immunisation Register on 1800 653 809.

For further information please contact Amanda Whittle, Clinical Nurse Specialist – Public Health or Nancy Birch, Clinical Nurse Manager – Public Health **on 9781 2359 (office hours).**

Sincerely,

Dr Naru Pal
Public Health Physician, South West Population Health Unit