

October 2009

Dear Parents, Guardians and Students,

The Indiana State Department of Health and the Indiana Department of Education have asked that school systems provide important information to parents and guardians of students about pertussis (whooping cough) and the vaccines available to prevent this serious illness.

Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*. Pertussis is spread by infectious airborne droplets created when a person who is infected coughs or sneezes. Infants and young children are typically vaccinated against pertussis, but the vaccine loses effectiveness as children get older and vaccinated children can become infected.

Pertussis causes severe coughing fits. During the fits, the affected person may be short of breath and appear distressed. The coughing fit may be followed by vomiting and exhaustion. Young infants are at highest risk for developing complications like pneumonia and seizures from the disease.

Adolescents and adults who have been previously vaccinated may have milder disease, but they can still spread pertussis to others. The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a routine pertussis booster for all 11-12 year old children, and for anyone older who did not have a booster at 11-12 years of age. The pertussis booster (Tdap) is combined with tetanus toxoid and takes the place of one tetanus booster shot. The Tdap vaccine can be given as soon as one year after a regular tetanus booster.

Please talk with your child's healthcare provider about the Tdap vaccine. Additional resources for families to obtain information about pertussis disease include the following websites:

The Indiana State Department of Health

<http://www.in.gov/isdh/22191.htm>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pertussis/default.htm>

Sincerely,

Deb Robarge RN BSN NCSN
ISD Health Center Director