

May 12, 2008

Update for parents of students at East Bay Waldorf School

From: Erika Jenssen, Contra Costa Public Health

We have received confirmation of at least one additional person in the Waldorf school community with whooping cough. This brings the total number of cases to 17. Contra Costa Public Health will consider next steps as more information becomes available. The following are considered essential steps in achieving control of the whooping cough outbreak.

Requirements:

- In order to return to school on Monday, May 12, students, faculty and staff must be symptom-free and present proof of antibiotics. A person must have begun taking the antibiotics (at least one dose) before they return to the school. This proof can be a letter from a doctor, a prescription or a prescription receipt. This information should be faxed to Contra Costa Public Health at (925) 313-6465.
- If a student, faculty or staff member chooses not to take antibiotics; they must stay home for 21 days, and can return to school on Friday, May 30. We encourage people who are staying home to monitor themselves and their children for symptoms of whooping cough and to not attend public gatherings.
- People with symptoms of whooping cough, including runny nose, sneezing, watery eyes, fever over 99.8 F and coughing must be excluded from school immediately. People with symptoms need to complete the five-day course of antibiotics. They may return to school 24 hours after they finish the last dose of antibiotics.

Frequently asked questions:

Why is there such concern about whooping cough?

Whooping cough can have very serious consequences for children less than 1 year of age and those who are immunocompromised. Serious consequences can include hospitalization and death. In December 2007, a one-month-old baby in Sonoma County died of whooping cough. In a different outbreak in Contra Costa County two years ago (not associated with EBWS), three young children were hospitalized.

Why are you requiring antibiotics for the whole school?

Because there have been so many cases of whooping cough at the school, we are assuming that exposure is widespread. Antibiotics prevent people who have been exposed to whooping cough from getting the disease. If a person is already infected with whooping cough, the five days of antibiotic medication makes them not infectious (again, these individuals are required to stay home until they have finished all five days of antibiotics and have been cleared by Contra Costa Public Health to return to school). We are relying on families to take the full 5-day course of antibiotics if they have presented proof of a prescription. If, after the five days of antibiotics, there are new exposures to whooping cough, then the antibiotics will need to be repeated. We want to stop transmission now and avoid ongoing exposure for our school community.

If my child is vaccinated, why do they need to take antibiotics?

The pertussis vaccine is good but it is not perfect. The estimates are that it is 80-85% effective if a child is fully vaccinated at kindergarten entry. As a child grows up, the protection from the vaccine wanes and a booster dose of pertussis vaccine is recommended beginning at age 10-12 years and for adults. Because we cannot tell which children are going to be protected by the vaccine at this stage and there has been ongoing exposure, we are making the antibiotic policy apply to all children, faculty and staff regardless of vaccination status effective are more likely to get disease.

Are there any exceptions to the new requirements?

The only exceptions to the above policies (taking this course of antibiotics and being symptom-free) are those children who have been confirmed to have pertussis in the past month and have been reported to Contra Costa Public Health. Contra Costa Public Health has been and will continue to evaluate these children on an individual basis to determine that they are no longer infectious before they can return to school. After having been cleared to return to school by Contra Costa Public Health, people with confirmed whooping cough may continue to have symptoms but they are no longer infectious.

Does my whole family need to take antibiotics?

This is a decision that you must evaluate for your individual situation and we encourage you to call your health care provider to discuss it. There have been people with whooping cough at the school, on the bus and at school events within the last 21 days. Some of the questions that we would ask to help you make this determination are:

- 1) Have you had close contact (within 3 feet) with anyone who has been coughing?
- 2) Has anyone in the family been diagnosed with whooping cough?
- 3) Have you had anyone cough or sneeze in your face?
- 4) Do you have anyone pregnant, a child under one year of age or anyone immunocompromised in your household?
- 5) Have you been vaccinated against whooping cough?

What if my child or I have symptoms?

People with symptoms need to be evaluated by their health care provider. If a person does have whooping cough, the choices are to 1) remain home from school for 5 days while taking antibiotics or 2) to stay home for at least 21 days. People with whooping cough also must notify the school and Contra Costa Public Health.

Why is it 21 days?

The incubation period for whooping cough is generally up to 21 days. For someone who has whooping cough, they can be infectious for up to 21 days after symptoms begin.