

County of Santa Clara

Public Health Department

Health Officer
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August 18, 2010

Dear Parent,

As the Health Officer for Santa Clara County, I want to provide you with the latest information regarding the current whooping cough (pertussis) epidemic in California.

There has been a dramatic increase in the number of cases of pertussis (commonly referred to as "whooping cough") in California this year, and 7 infants have died. Fortunately, no whooping cough-related deaths have been reported in Santa Clara County so far this year, but we have seen many more cases of whooping cough than usual.

Whooping cough symptoms usually start out like the common cold with a runny nose or congestion, sneezing and possibly a mild cough or fever. After 1-2 weeks, there are bursts or attacks of severe coughing. At the end of each cough, there can be a high-pitched "whoop" sound. These coughing fits are very dangerous to infants and small children and make it difficult for them to breathe. Please note that not everyone with whooping cough will have a cough with a "whoop" sound. During this epidemic, anyone with cough symptoms of greater than two weeks should contact their health care provider. Whooping cough can cause serious illness and babies who are too young to have had all their shots are especially at risk of severe illness and even death.

Whooping cough is a vaccine-preventable disease. The best way to stop this epidemic and keep it from spreading to babies is to get as many people vaccinated as possible. Because the vaccine wears off with time, young people and adults should also get a shot for whooping cough. Adults and adolescents who are in close contact with babies, employees in school or child-care settings, and health-care providers are strongly encouraged to receive a whooping cough booster shot.

As a parent, you play a key role in helping to prevent whooping cough and control its spread. If your child shows any of the symptoms listed above, bring them to a physician for evaluation right away and keep your child home from school while ill. People with whooping cough are contagious from the time they begin to have the cold-like symptoms until about three weeks after the severe coughing attacks start. People who get treated with antibiotics are contagious until they have finished five days of treatment.

Make sure that your child is up-to-date on all vaccinations, and for you, ask your health care provider about the adult pertussis booster.

For more information on whooping cough, visit www.sccphd.org/whoopingcough or http://eziz.org/resources/materials_pertussis.html for school-specific whooping cough materials from the California Department of Public Health.

I sincerely hope you have a successful school year and that you and your family stay healthy!

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Martin Fenstersheib" with a stylized flourish at the end.

Marty Fenstersheib, MD, MPH
Health Officer