

Sunshine Coast Public Health Unit Update

Dear Families and Staff,

RE: Pertussis (Whooping Cough) increase in Sunshine Coast Region

The Sunshine Coast Public Health Unit has noted a significant increase in the number of cases of pertussis (“*whooping cough*”) throughout our Sunshine Coast communities, from Beerwah in the south, Gympie in the north and west, to Goomeri.

Together with Education Queensland, we are working to provide awareness to families across the region about this common respiratory bacteria that causes a prolonged cough.

Whooping cough may begin like a common cold, but unlike a cold, the coughing can last for weeks or months. Symptoms of whooping cough usually develop 5 to 10 days after exposure to the bacteria but can take as long as 3 weeks. Please observe your child for signs and symptoms and if they become symptomatic, we recommend you:

1. Exclude your child from school.
2. Keep your sick child away from young children (especially those under one year old) and pregnant women.
3. Please see your doctor (bring this letter with you) for early detection (respiratory swab PCR testing). Where antibiotic treatment is indicated, this will shorten the duration of the illness and prevent spread.

Vaccination is the best way we can reduce whooping cough in our community. The disease can still occur in vaccinated people, but symptoms are usually less severe. If anyone in your family has recently had whooping cough infection vaccination is recommended as soon as they have recovered.

If your child has missed any of their scheduled vaccinations, please discuss with your vaccination provider. If your child is in Year 7, they are eligible for a Pertussis vaccination as part of the School Immunisation Program. Contact your child’s school for dates.

For more information about Whooping cough, please see attached Queensland Health fact sheet

During business hours, the Public Health Unit can be contacted on 1300 017 190.

Yours Sincerely



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Pertussis (whooping cough)

Communicable diseases factsheet

Pertussis affects people of all ages but can be very serious in babies. It can be prevented by immunisation at two, four, six and eighteen months of age. Booster shots are needed for four-year-olds and teenagers, and adults living or working with small children. Treatment helps control further spread of the infection.

What is pertussis?

Pertussis (or whooping cough) is a disease caused by infection of the throat with the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*.

What are the symptoms?

- Pertussis usually begins just like a cold, with a runny nose, tiredness and sometimes a mild fever.
- Coughing then develops, usually in bouts, followed by a deep gasp (or “whoop”). Sometimes people vomit after coughing.
- Pertussis can be very serious in small children. They might go blue or stop breathing during coughing attacks and may need to go to the hospital.
- Older children and adults may have a less serious illness, with bouts of coughing that continue for many weeks regardless of treatment.

How is it spread?

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

The time between exposure and getting sick is usually seven to ten days but can be up to three weeks.

Who is at risk?

- Anyone can get pertussis.
- People living in the same household as someone with pertussis are more likely to catch it.
- Immunisation greatly reduces your risk of infection, but reinfection can occur.

How is it prevented?

Immunise your child on time

- The vaccine does not give lifelong protection against pertussis, and protection is sometimes incomplete.
- Children need to be immunised at two, four and six months.
- Boosters are given at 18 months, four years of age and again at 15 years of age.
- Immunisation is available through general practitioners and some local councils.

Keep your baby away from people who cough

- Babies need two or three vaccinations before they are protected. For this reason, it is very important to keep people with coughing illnesses away from your baby, so they don't pass on pertussis or other germs.

Get immunised if you are an adult in close contact with small children

A vaccine for adults is available. It is recommended for:

- both parents when planning a pregnancy, or as soon as the baby is born
- grandparent and others who will have contact with the baby
- adults working with young children, especially health care and childcare workers.

If you are a close contact of someone with pertussis:

Please watch out for the symptoms. If symptoms develop, see your doctor, take this factsheet with you and mention your contact with pertussis.

Some close contacts at high risk (e.g. children under one year, children not fully vaccinated, and women at the end of their pregnancy) and others who live or work with high-risk people may need to take antibiotics to prevent infection.

If you have pertussis:

Get treated early

While infectious, avoid other people and stay away from young children, e.g., at childcare centres, pre-school, and school

How is it diagnosed?

If a doctor thinks someone has pertussis, a swab from the back of the nose, or a blood test may be done to help confirm the diagnosis.

How is it treated?

A special antibiotic – usually azithromycin for 5 days, or erythromycin or clarithromycin for 7 days. These antibiotics can prevent the spread of the germ to other people.

Coughing often continues for many weeks despite treatment.

What is the public health response?

Doctors and laboratories must confidentially notify cases of pertussis to the local Public Health Unit. Public Health Unit staff can advise on the best way to stop further spread.

Infectious children are restricted from going to pre-school and school. Unimmunised contacts may be excluded from childcare unless they take the special antibiotics.