UK Health Security Agency

East Midlands Health Protection Team
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Dear parent or guardian,

This letter contains important health information

I am writing to inform you that the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA East Midlands Health Protection team) has identified an increase in confirmed or suspected cases of whooping cough (pertussis) in school age children across the East Midlands region. Individual cases have been provided with advice, but we would like to take this opportunity to raise awareness regarding vaccination and symptoms of whooping cough to be aware of.

Symptoms

Whooping cough is caused by infection with pertussis bacteria. For most school-age patients, symptoms will resolve over a number of weeks, while for some, coughing can persist for a few months.

The symptoms of pertussis include:

- a cough lasting several weeks following initial cold-like symptoms
- prolonged bouts of coughing (‘paroxysms’)
- post-coughing retching or vomiting
- a ‘whoop’ sound on breathing in
- rib pain

Find more information about pertussis on the NHS website:
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/whooping-cough/

Untreated pertussis is no longer infectious after 21 days but with appropriate antibiotic treatment this reduces to 48 hours.

Advice for parents or guardians

If your child has any of the symptoms described above, we advise you seek medical advice from a GP and take along this letter.

Your GP may then arrange testing for whooping cough.

Your GP can also prescribe antibiotics without waiting for test results. Antibiotics are not required if there has been more than 21 days of coughing. Whooping cough is no longer infectious from 48 hours of starting appropriate antibiotics, but your child should stay isolated at home until they have had 48 hours of antibiotic treatment.

Whooping cough is spread through respiratory droplets: coughing into tissues and washing hands with soap and water can reduce spread.

If your child missed any of their infant or pre-school vaccines, we recommend that you arrange catch-up vaccination through your GP practice as soon as possible. If your child is up to date with their pertussis vaccination, we do not advise any further boosters.

It is still possible for fully vaccinated children to develop whooping cough (although the illness is generally milder) so if your child develops symptoms they should be taken to the GP for advice.

At-risk groups

Whooping cough is of most concern in unimmunised infants when it can be life threatening. Vaccinations to prevent whooping cough are routinely given to infants, pre-school children, and pregnant women.

We recommend all pregnant women get their routine vaccination against pertussis ideally between weeks 20 and 32 of pregnancy (but can be given from 16 weeks and up until labour if needed) in order to protect their baby.

Those in risk groups or with regular contact with persons in a risk group should consider avoiding events where they may come into contact with those unwell with pertussis.

Yours sincerely,

David Pearce
Regional Deputy Director
East Midlands Health Protection team
UK Health Security Agency