

**GREENWICH CENTRAL SCHOOL
HEALTH OFFICES**

PERTUSSIS

Petussis (Whooping Cough) is a highly contagious disease involving the respiratory tract. It is caused by a bacteria that is found in the mouth, nose and throat of an infected person, It can occur at any age, although most of the reported cases occur in children under five years. However, the number of cases in adolescence and adults is increasing including the vaccinated age groups as well.

Pertussis is spread primarily by direct contact with discharges from the nose and throat of infected individuals. It can be spread through the air by coughing. Symptoms resemble those of a common cold, including sneezing, runny nose, and a cough. Low-grade fever may or may not be present. Within 2 weeks, the cough becomes more severe and is characterized by episodes of numerous rapid coughs followed by a crowing or high-pitched whoop. A thick, clear mucous may be discharged. These episodes may recur for one to two months, and are more frequent at night. Older people, vaccinated and/ or partially immunized children, generally have milder symptoms. The incubation period is usually five to ten days, but may be as long as 21 days. A person can transmit pertussis from onset of symptoms to three weeks after the onset of coughing episodes. The period of communicability is reduced to five days after antibiotic therapy is begun. People who have had past infection with pertussis usually have prolonged immunity.

The vaccine for pertussis is usually given in combination with diphtheria and tetanus. Immunization should be given at two, four, six and 15-18 months of age and between four and six years of age. The vaccine cannot be administered at age 7yrs. or older.

The single most effective measure to control the spread of pertussis is maintaining the highest possible level of immunization in the community. Treating cases with antibiotics can shorten the contagious period to five days. People who have been diagnosed with pertussis should stay away from young children and infants until properly treated. People who are in close contact with someone with pertussis should be treated with an antibiotic as well.

Anyone showing signs or symptoms of pertussis, or having had an exposure to someone with pertussis, should see a physician right away. A swab of the nose and back of the throat is obtained by the physician and sent away for culture. This culture will confirm or exclude the diagnosis of pertussis. If your child has been diagnosed with pertussis, or has had a direct exposure to pertussis, please notify the school health offices right away. Your Doctor should notify your local public health department.