

To Protect and Promote the Health and the Environment of the People of Kittitas County

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Whooping Cough (Pertussis) in Ellensburg Schools

The Kittitas County Public Health Department (KCPHD) has been notified that two Ellensburg School District students were diagnosed with pertussis, more commonly called whooping cough. One student attends Ellensburg High School and the other student attends the Ellensburg Developmental Preschool. At least two other cases are linked to these two original cases. However, at this time, no other schools are involved.

The best ways to stop the spread of whooping cough are vaccination, staying home when you're sick, covering your cough or sneeze, and frequent hand washing. If you are not up-to-date on pertussis vaccination, you should get vaccinated as soon as possible. The vaccine is available from your healthcare provider and at KCPHD. Vaccination reduces the chances of getting whooping cough but does not entirely eliminate the risk.

Whooping cough symptoms may be mild at first, with runny nose and occasional cough. After a few days, the cough becomes more severe. Spasms of coughing may end with a gasp, a "whoop," or vomiting. Coughing spasms may continue for several weeks before resolving, even with treatment.

If you suspect whooping cough, call a healthcare provider right away. Antibiotics may shorten the course of the illness if given early enough. After a five-day course of antibiotics, a person with pertussis is no longer considered contagious. People with pertussis should stay home and avoid spreading the disease during the five days of antibiotic treatment. Without antibiotics, people with whooping cough are considered contagious for at least three weeks.

Most people who get whooping cough get it through close contact with someone who has whooping cough. Close contact involves direct, face-to-face contact or close proximity with a symptomatic person for a prolonged period, and may include household members, close friends, and contacts in class or after-school settings. Close contact does not include walking by a person or briefly sitting across a room. According to the Washington State Department of Health (DOH) pertussis bacteria can live on a surface or object for several days, but this is not a common way to get pertussis.

KCPHD advises all children and adults to be up-to-date on their vaccinations (DTaP for children, Tdap for adolescents or adults). Currently, one dose of Tdap is recommended for all adults and adolescents ages eleven and up. It is also recommended that pregnant women receive a dose of Tdap during each pregnancy, preferably between weeks twenty-seven and thirty-six. For complete vaccination schedules for infants and children, preteens and teens, and adults, please see www.cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/.

For more information about whooping cough, visit the DOH website at <http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/WhoopingCough>. Please contact Kittitas County Public Health Department at (509) 962-7515 if you have additional questions or concerns.

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