



## Pertussis Guidance for Schools

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### Pertussis Guidance for MSBSD Schools

#### What is Pertussis?

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a highly contagious bacterial infection that spreads through respiratory droplets (e.g., coughing, sneezing) and shared saliva (e.g., kissing, sharing utensils). It poses higher risks to vulnerable populations, including infants, pregnant women, and individuals with chronic medical conditions. Pertussis is vaccine-preventable and can be effectively managed with early detection and appropriate treatment.

#### Resources

1. [Pertussis Fact Sheet for Clinicians](#)
2. [CDC Pertussis](#)
3. [State of Alaska Pertussis website](#)
4. [Whooping Cough for Schools Flyer for parents](#)
5. [State of Alaska Docket App](#)

#### Return to School Criteria

1. **Completion of Antibiotic Treatment:** Infected individuals cannot return to school until they have completed the full 5-day course of appropriate antibiotics as directed by a healthcare provider.
2. **Awaiting Test Results:** Students or staff awaiting laboratory results should stay home while awaiting pertussis lab results.
3. **Healthcare Clearance:** Return to school requires healthcare provider recommendations and clearance based on the individual's condition and risk to others.

#### Post-Exposure Guidance

Close contacts of pertussis cases (e.g., household members, close classmates) should:

1. **Consult a Healthcare Provider:** Post-exposure prophylaxis (antibiotics) may be prescribed.
2. **Monitor for Symptoms:** Watch for symptoms for at least 21 days and follow healthcare provider recommendations for testing and treatment.
3. **Contact Tracing:** Nurses will not be contact tracing. However, family members who may have been exposed should be encouraged to seek guidance from their healthcare provider.

#### Steps for Schools to Follow

1. **Referral to Healthcare Providers**
  - o Any student or staff member exhibiting pertussis-like symptoms (e.g., persistent coughing, whooping sound, or vomiting after coughing) can be referred to a healthcare provider.
2. **Exclusion and Clearance**

- Students or staff awaiting laboratory results should stay home while awaiting pertussis lab results.
3. **Communication with Families**
- Inform families of the importance of adhering to healthcare provider instructions and completing treatments.
  - Provide families with resources for accessing healthcare services if they lack a regular provider.

### Preventive Measures in Schools

1. **Vaccination Awareness**
  - Encourage families and staff to ensure their DTaP/Tdap vaccinations are current.
  - Pregnant women should receive the Tdap vaccine during each pregnancy (27–36 weeks).
2. **Hygiene Promotion**
  - Reinforce proper handwashing and cough etiquette (e.g., using tissues or elbows to cover sneezes/coughs).
3. **Environmental Cleaning**
  - To minimize the spread of germs, regularly disinfect high-touch surfaces such as desks, door handles, and shared equipment.
4. **Monitoring and Early Action**
  - Be vigilant for early symptoms of pertussis, especially in individuals with prolonged coughs or high-risk exposures, and refer them to healthcare providers promptly.

### Additional Recommendations

- Testing is recommended for symptomatic individuals, particularly infants, pregnant women, and healthcare workers.
- Post-exposure prophylaxis is advised for household contacts, pregnant women, and high-risk individuals exposed within 21 days of symptom onset in a confirmed case.

### Collaboration and Communication

By following these guidelines and working closely with healthcare providers, families, and school staff, the Mat-Su Borough School District can adopt a balanced approach to protect public health while minimizing disruptions to education. Collaboration remains essential for managing pertussis effectively and ensuring the well-being of the school community.

### Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Q&A for School Nurses

1. **What is pertussis, and how does it spread?**  
Pertussis is a contagious bacterial infection spread through respiratory droplets (coughing, sneezing) and saliva, such as sharing utensils or kissing.
2. **What are the symptoms of pertussis?**  
Early symptoms include a mild cough, runny nose, and low fever. Later symptoms, particularly in infants, may involve severe coughing fits, a "whooping" sound, vomiting after coughing, or difficulty breathing ([Pertussis Fact Sheet for Clinicians](#)).
3. **When should students or staff with symptoms stay home?**  
Students or staff with pertussis-like symptoms should stay home until they have completed a 5-day antibiotic treatment, tested negative for pertussis, or received clearance from a healthcare provider.
4. **How long is a person contagious with pertussis?**  
Without treatment, a person can be contagious for up to 21 days after symptoms begin. With antibiotics, they are no longer contagious after 5 days of treatment.
5. **What should we do if there is a confirmed case at school?**  
Notify close contacts, such as household members or classmates. Encourage exposed

individuals to consult a healthcare provider for testing or preventive antibiotics. Monitor exposed individuals for symptoms for 21 days.

6. **What preventive measures should the school take?**

Ensure that DTaP/Tdap vaccinations are up to date. Promote proper handwashing and cough etiquette, and regularly disinfect high-touch surfaces.

7. **What resources can I share with families?**

Families can refer to the CDC's pertussis information at [the CDC Pertussis, State of Alaska Pertussis website](#), [Whooping Cough for Schools Flyer](#), and check vaccination records via the [State of Alaska Docket App](#).

8. **What should I do if I suspect pertussis in a student?**

Refer the student to a healthcare provider for evaluation and exclude them from school until they have been treated, tested negative, or cleared by a provider.

9. **How should I approach a staff member suspected of having pertussis?**

Approach with sensitivity and privacy, ensuring confidentiality. Inform them of Alaska's guidelines and recommend they seek healthcare evaluation. Encourage them to follow their provider's recommendations for exclusion, noting that exclusion is temporary. Provide support, such as information on testing or treatment resources. They may return to work after completing a 5-day antibiotic course, testing negative, or obtaining healthcare clearance.

10. **Can vaccinated individuals still get pertussis?**

Yes, but symptoms are usually milder. Vaccination remains the best defense against severe illness.

11. **How can we educate families about pertussis?**

Families should understand the importance of completing antibiotic treatments and staying home if infected. Encourage vaccinations to protect the community and provide information on recognizing symptoms and seeking timely care.

This streamlined Q&A equips school nurses to effectively manage pertussis cases while fostering trust and promoting public health.

## **Newsletter Items**

### **Pertussis Alert for Parents: Cases Rising in Alaska**

Pertussis (whooping cough) cases are increasing across Alaska, affecting all age groups, including vaccinated individuals. Stay informed and proactive to protect your family and community.

### **What is Pertussis?**

Pertussis is a highly contagious bacterial infection spread through coughing, sneezing, or shared saliva. It can cause severe coughing fits and is especially dangerous for infants and those with chronic health conditions.

### **Symptoms to Watch For**

- Mild cough, runny nose, low fever (early symptoms).
- Severe coughing fits, "whooping" sound, vomiting after coughing (later symptoms).

### **What Should You Do?**

- Stay Home: If your child has symptoms, keep them home and contact a healthcare provider.
- Follow Treatment: Infected children can return to school only after completing a 5-day antibiotic treatment or receiving healthcare clearance.
- Watch for Exposure: Monitor for symptoms for 21 days if exposed, consult your provider about preventive antibiotics.

## **Protect Your Family**

- **Vaccinate:** Ensure your family’s DTaP/Tdap vaccinations are current.
  - **Practice Hygiene:** Teach proper handwashing and coughing into elbows or tissues.
  - **Disinfect:** Regularly clean high-touch surfaces like door handles and toys.
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Learn more at [CDC Pertussis](https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/) or check vaccination records using the State of Alaska Docket App.

Let’s work together to keep our school and community healthy!

## **Newsletter/Social Media Posts**

### **Pertussis Alert: Rising Cases in Alaska – What Parents Need to Know**

Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, spreads across Alaska, affecting people of all ages, including those vaccinated. Parents should monitor for symptoms such as mild cough, runny nose, and low fever early on, which may develop into severe coughing fits and a “whooping” sound. If your child shows any signs, keep them home from school and consult a healthcare provider for testing and treatment to help stop the spread.

### **Whooping Cough on the Rise: Protect Your Family Today**

Alaska is seeing a significant rise in pertussis cases, a highly contagious bacterial infection. Early detection is key—watch for prolonged cough, difficulty breathing, or vomiting after coughing. Vaccination reduces severe illness, but no one is fully immune. If symptoms appear, contact your healthcare provider promptly to ensure your family's and others' safety.

### **Stop the Spread: Tips to Keep Pertussis Out of Our Schools**

Pertussis can quickly spread in schools and daycare settings. Symptoms may start mild, like a cold, but progress to severe coughing spells. To prevent the spread, teach kids to cover their mouths, practice good handwashing, and stay home if sick. Parents should also stay informed about vaccination schedules and consult a healthcare provider if symptoms occur or exposure is suspected.

### **Pertussis Cases Surge – Here’s How to Stay Safe**

The recent rise in whooping cough cases reminds parents to stay alert. Pertussis spreads through coughing and sneezing and can affect anyone, even those who have been vaccinated. Regularly disinfect shared surfaces, monitor for symptoms such as severe cough or a “whooping” sound, and consult with healthcare providers if your child shows signs of infection or has been exposed.

### **Coughing? It Could Be Pertussis. Learn the Signs and Protect Your Community**

Persistent coughing, a “whooping” noise when breathing in, or vomiting after coughing could indicate pertussis. It’s important to recognize these symptoms early and seek medical advice to confirm the diagnosis. Children with pertussis should stay home for at least five days after starting antibiotics. These steps help protect your family and the wider school community from this highly contagious disease.

### **Whooping Cough Warning: Key Facts for Every Parent**

Pertussis can affect anyone and is spreading rapidly in Alaska. Early symptoms mimic a cold but can progress to severe coughing fits and breathing difficulties. Parents are encouraged to vaccinate children, keep symptomatic children home, and follow healthcare provider recommendations for testing and treatment to limit the spread in schools and communities.

### **Vaccinated? You Can Still Catch Pertussis – Stay Informed!**

While vaccination is the best protection against severe pertussis, it doesn’t guarantee immunity. Vaccinated individuals can still contract and spread the infection. Stay vigilant for symptoms like prolonged coughing or post-cough vomiting, and contact your healthcare provider immediately if pertussis is suspected. Early action protects your child and others from complications.

**Pertussis in Alaska: A Growing Concern for All Ages**

Pertussis cases are rising across Alaska, and the infection affects individuals of all ages. Infants and those with weakened immune systems are at the most significant risk. Parents should monitor for symptoms such as a persistent cough or a “whooping” noise when breathing in. If exposed, consult a healthcare provider about preventive antibiotics and necessary steps to protect their family.

**Stay Ahead of Pertussis: Prevention Starts with Awareness**

Stopping the spread of pertussis begins with awareness and action. Vaccinations, proper hygiene, and monitoring for symptoms like a persistent cough are essential. If someone in your household is exposed or symptomatic, seek medical advice immediately. Taking early steps ensures the health and safety of your family and community.

**Keep Your Family Safe: What You Need to Know About Pertussis**

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a preventable yet highly contagious disease that is on the rise in Alaska. Symptoms may start as a mild cold but progress to severe coughing fits that can last for weeks. Parents should ensure their children's vaccinations are current, watch for signs of infection, and seek prompt healthcare advice to protect their children and others in their community.