



**TOWN OF WESTWOOD**  
COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS  
Board of Health



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### **Pertussis Advisory**

October 8, 2024

The Westwood Board of Health would like to advise the Westwood High School community that there has been a confirmed case of pertussis (whooping cough) at Westwood High School. At this time, there are no recommendations for antibiotics for your child. However, parents and guardians should be aware of the signs and symptoms of pertussis. If your child has symptoms or develops symptoms, testing is recommended and five days of antibiotic treatment will be required before being able to return to school.

**What is pertussis?** Pertussis (also called whooping cough) is a disease caused by bacteria that spreads from person to person with close contact. Pertussis is often mild in older children and adults, but can cause serious problems in infants.

**Who gets pertussis?** In MA, pertussis is most common among people 10-20 years old who have lost the protection they got from childhood vaccines. Infants are also likely to get the disease since they are often too young to have full protection from the vaccine.

**What are the symptoms?** Pertussis is a cough illness whose symptoms can range from mild to severe. It usually begins with cold-like symptoms, with a runny nose, sneezing and dry cough. The cough lasts for a week or two, then slowly gets worse. The next stage, which may last from four to six weeks, is marked by uncontrollable coughing spells, often followed by vomiting. Between spells, the person may appear to be well and usually there is no fever. These typical symptoms are more common in infants and young children. Vaccinated children, teens and adults may have milder symptoms that can seem like bronchitis.

**How is pertussis spread?** The germs that cause pertussis live in the nose, mouth and throat and are sprayed into the air when an infected person sneezes, coughs or talks. Other people can then inhale the germs in the droplets produced by the person with pertussis. Touching a tissue or sharing a cup used by someone with the disease can also spread the disease. The first symptoms usually appear 7 to 10 days after a person is exposed, although sometimes people do not get sick for up to 21 days after their last exposure.

**How is pertussis diagnosed?** A doctor may think a patient has pertussis based on their symptoms. However, a laboratory test is the only way to confirm pertussis. The type of test that should be done depends on the age of your child and how long they have been coughing. Your child's health care provider should consult with the Department of Public Health to determine the correct test.

**How can pertussis be prevented?** Although DTP or DTaP vaccine (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis) usually provides adequate protection against pertussis, the effects of the vaccine wear off over time, leaving most teens and adults at risk of the disease. However, a vaccine for teens and adults, called Tdap, is now recommended to provide protection against pertussis in these age groups. Tdap is given as a single "booster" dose. If your child or adolescent (10 years of age or older) has not yet had a dose of Tdap, contact your healthcare provider to discuss receiving this vaccine. If your child is less than 7 years of age, they should be up to date (check with your provider if you are unsure). Antibiotics are sometimes given to help prevent illness in the contacts of someone with pertussis or to decrease infectiousness in someone with pertussis. After five days of treatment a case is no longer contagious.

**What should I do?** If your child has any symptoms of pertussis, please contact your health care provider and bring this advisory with you. If you have any questions, please contact the Westwood Board of Health at 781-251-2576 or the Massachusetts Department of Public Health at (617) 983-6800.