

Dear Parents, Guardians and Students,

The Indiana State Department of Health and the Indiana Department of Education have asked that school systems provide important information to parents and guardians of students about pertussis (whooping cough) and the vaccines available to prevent this serious illness.

Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*. Pertussis is spread by droplets created when an infected person coughs or sneezes. Infants and young children are usually vaccinated against pertussis, but the vaccine becomes less effective as children get older, and vaccinated children can become infected.

Pertussis causes severe coughing fits. During a coughing fit, the infected person may be short of breath and appear frightened. The coughing fit may be followed by vomiting and exhaustion. Young infants are at highest risk for developing complications from the disease like pneumonia and seizures.

Teens and adults who received the whooping cough vaccine when they were younger might have milder disease if they get sick with pertussis, but they can still spread it to others. The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends a pertussis vaccine for all 11-12 year old children, and for anyone older who did not have a at the vaccine at 11-12 years of age. The pertussis vaccine (Tdap) is combined with tetanus vaccine and takes the place of one tetanus booster shot. The Tdap vaccine can be given as soon as one year after a regular tetanus booster.

Beginning in the 2010-2011 school year, the Tdap vaccine will be required for all students in grades 6 -12. Please talk with your child's healthcare provider about the Tdap vaccine.

Additional resources for families to obtain information about pertussis disease include the following websites:

The Indiana State Department of Health

<http://www.in.gov/isdh/22191.htm>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pertussis/default.htm>