



May 8, 2017 FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Confirmed Pertussis Case at Ferndale High School

BELLINGHAM—Whatcom County Health Department has confirmed one case of pertussis in a student at Ferndale High School. Students and staff who may have had contact with this individual have been notified and are urged to monitor for symptoms of pertussis during the time period they are likely to show signs of illness.

Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is a highly contagious bacterial infection. It is usually spread through coughing or sneezing, and symptoms usually appear 5 to 21 days after exposure. Infected individuals who are not treated can spread the disease for several weeks.

Individuals who do become sick are urged to stay home from work or school, to avoid contact with infants or pregnant women in the household, and to visit their healthcare provider. Everyone, regardless of if they become ill or not, should check that they are up-to-date on their vaccinations, wash their hands frequently with soap and water, and keep infants away from anyone who might be sick.

Pertussis is especially serious for babies, who have more severe symptoms than older children or adults. In addition to severe coughing spells, they might have difficulty eating, drinking, breathing or sleeping. Older kids and adults may only have a runny nose and low fever followed by a persistent cough. Not everyone who has whooping cough has makes the classic “whoop” sound.

Vaccination is the best available protection against pertussis. Two vaccines are available: DTap for young children, and Tdap for adults and children over 11. For more details about vaccination against pertussis, visit www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/WhoopingCough/WhoopingCoughFAQ#vaccine.

Public health nurses at Whatcom County Health Department are continuing to monitor disease levels and investigate any reports of illness.

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