

Frequently Asked Questions for School Health Personnel

1. How can I protect myself and my community from pertussis?

The best way to prevent pertussis is by being up-to-date with vaccines. However, booster doses are needed throughout one's lifetime. Protection against pertussis after vaccination or after having disease goes away with time.

Persons with suspected pertussis cannot go to school or work for the first 5 days of antibiotics. This is because the disease can still spread. Persons with pertussis can return to school or work on the 6th day after starting treatment.

You can also slow the spread of pertussis by covering your cough and sneeze, washing your hands often, and staying home when sick. Wearing a mask is not an effective way to prevent spread of pertussis.

2. Given the routine risk of exposure to students with pertussis, should I be getting Tdap boosters more frequently?

There is not enough evidence to make an official recommendation for Tdap revaccination. However, individuals may choose to consult with their healthcare provider to get revaccinated with Tdap, per California Department of Public Health recommendations. All pregnant women and individuals in contact with infants too young to receive DTaP should receive a Tdap in every pregnancy.

3. What do I tell a parent who has notified us that his/her child has pertussis?

You should inform the parent of the following information once notified that his/her child has suspected pertussis:

- The child must stay out of daycare/school.
- The child can return once he/she is no longer infectious with pertussis (*this is determined by Public Health*)
- A medical note from the provider with the provider's name and contact information should be shared with the school.
- Public Health will be in contact with the family to verify information of pertussis.

4. Why is it important to diagnose and report pertussis cases to Public Health promptly?

Diseases in schools can easily spread to the general community. Other students, school staff, and siblings, including infants, can get pertussis. One or two cases in a school can lead to an outbreak that can last several months. Untreated students can spread the disease for up to 21 days after the cough begins. Students must complete 5 days of an appropriate antibiotic to no longer spread the disease. Health care providers, laboratories and schools are legally mandated to report suspected pertussis cases to the local health department. Pertussis cases must be reported to Public Health as quickly as possible. Delayed reporting allows persons with pertussis to spread the disease for longer periods of time. It is important students with suspected pertussis to be kept out of school and evaluated by a medical provider right away to reduce spread of disease.