



21 August 2017

Dear Parent or Guardian,

RE: Whooping cough (pertussis) at Stella Maris School

A student at Stella Maris has recently been diagnosed with whooping cough.

Whooping cough is a highly infectious bacterial disease that is easily spread by coughing and sneezing. It commonly causes bouts of severe coughing that can disturb sleep and can last for up to 3 months. Whooping cough can be especially severe in young infants under one year old, causing pneumonia and difficulties breathing. Your child may not be in this age bracket, but the risk is that they can pass the illness onto a contact in the house or family.

We have sought advice on how to best approach this from Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS) which has provided the information and recommendations in this letter.

FACTS ABOUT WHOOPING COUGH

- For every 100 children under 12 months with whooping cough, around 70 will be hospitalised, seven will require intensive care, and there is a small but real risk of permanent medical complications or death
- 80% of infants catch whooping cough from a parent, caregiver, or older brother or sister
- The disease is usually milder in teenagers and adults, however some will get pneumonia, and severe coughing can cause sleep disturbance, incontinence, vomiting, and broken ribs
- One person with whooping cough will pass it on to an average of 15 other people
- Anyone who is exposed can get whooping cough because immunity (protection) from immunisation or past whooping cough infection is not 100% and decreases over time
- Generally a person needs to be in **close contact** with someone with whooping cough – this means face to face contact for more than one hour while that person was infectious

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO HELP PREVENT WHOOPING COUGH?

1. **Ensure your Children are Immunised:** Immunisation is the best way to protect against whooping cough. Whooping cough immunisation for children is offered at **six weeks, three months, five months, four years and 11 years**. Immunisation during childhood is free, however adult immunisation is not.
2. **Antibiotics from your GP:** A course of antibiotics (chemoprophylaxis) after exposure reduces the risk of a person catching whooping cough. Antibiotics are not 100% effective for preventing whooping cough but **are recommended for close contacts exposed at school who live with any children under 12 months old, any unimmunised or partially immunised children under 5 years, a pregnant woman in the third trimester, or anyone with a chronic illness or weak immune system.**

3. **See your GP if you are worried your child has whooping cough:** Your child's teacher may ask you to take your child to see their GP for assessment if they start to show signs of whooping cough. Even if they are fully immunised, your child should be seen by their GP if they develop a cough that ends in a whoop sound, gagging, vomiting, or if the cough is worse at night and disturbs their sleep. This is especially important if the cough has lasted more than two weeks.
4. **Talk to Your Children about Covering Coughs and Sneezes:** Children should be taught to cover their mouth and nose when they cough or sneeze, to throw away any tissues they have used themselves, and to wash and dry their hands well afterwards. This helps prevent illnesses with coughs and sneezes, like whooping cough, from spreading.
5. **Excluding Children with Whooping Cough from School:** Children **diagnosed with whooping cough** are excluded from school while they are still infectious in accordance with the Health (Infectious and Notifiable Diseases) Regulations 1966. This means staying at home until they have completed at least five days of a 14 day course of antibiotics OR until three weeks have passed since their bad cough started if they don't take antibiotics.

WHERE CAN YOU GET MORE INFORMATION?

Whooping cough is a notifiable disease under the Health Act 1956. If your child gets whooping cough, your doctor is required to inform Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS). ARPHS is responsible for helping to stop the spread of whooping cough in the community.

General information on whooping cough, information for people with whooping cough and for those who have been exposed to whooping cough is available from the Auckland Regional Public Health website www.arphs.govt.nz. If you don't have access to the internet or a printer, you can ask the school to get this information for you.

For other information on whooping cough, phone Healthline on 0800 611 116 or visit your family doctor. For information on immunisation, please call the Immunisation Advisory Centre on 0800 IMMUNE (0800 466 863) or visit their website www.immune.org.nz

Yours sincerely,



Alan Watts
Principal