



August 11, 2010

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As you may be aware, Stanislaus County and California are in the midst of a Pertussis (whooping cough) epidemic. To date, we have had more than 75 cases reported within our county and almost 2,500 statewide. Pertussis is a bacterial disease that causes severe coughing. The age range of cases is from three weeks to 85 years, with the median age of 11. Although the attack rates are highest among infants, 50% of the case reports are in school-aged children. The name "whooping cough" comes from the characteristic "whoop" often heard in infected children when they try to breathe after a coughing episode. People with pertussis may experience continuous coughing spells in rapid succession that can sometimes be followed by vomiting. Children who have symptoms of this illness should stay at home to avoid spreading this to other school-aged children.

Pertussis often starts like a common cold, with runny nose, slight fever, and cough, which worsens over 1-2 weeks and can last 1-2 months. The spread of pertussis can be minimized by covering coughs with a tissue, washing hands with soap and water after coughing or sneezing, and keeping your child home when he/she is sick. Infants and very young children are most at risk for severe illness and even death from pertussis infection. Unfortunately, our county has already experienced an infant death this year during May.

Children are required to be immunized against pertussis to enter school with a series of the DTaP vaccine. However, this vaccine wears off in 5 to 10 years. Consequently, older children and adults who have contact with young children are urged to be vaccinated, especially within families expecting a newborn infant.

Fortunately there are vaccines available for older children 7 -18 years of age that may help reduce your child's risk of getting sick with pertussis. For children in this age group there are two new booster vaccines available through your doctor, BOOSTRIX® and ADACEL®. Talk with your doctor to determine if your child should receive a booster, or if there are any other actions you should take to avoid pertussis.

More information is available on the Health Services Agency website at [www.hsahealth.org](http://www.hsahealth.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Tom Changnon'.

Tom Changnon  
Superintendent of Schools

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'John Walker, MD'.

John Walker, MD  
Public Health Officer