



CAIRNS PUBLIC HEALTH UNIT

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22/05/2017

Dear Parent

WHOOPING COUGH (PERTUSSIS)

There have been confirmed cases of whooping cough (pertussis) in children attending schools in the Cairns area. Providing children are adequately vaccinated against whooping cough, they are unlikely to have a severe illness, even if they do become infected.

Whooping cough is a highly infectious illness that can be very troublesome at any age, particularly in the first year of life. The symptoms are a persistent cough that may occur in bouts (often with a breathless 'whoop' at the end). Someone with whooping cough is highly infectious only for the first 3 weeks, but could pass the illness on to an infant or baby at home.

Whooping cough and milder respiratory infections frequently spread in schools. If your child develops a troublesome and persistent cough, take him/her to your doctor promptly (even if he/she is fully immunised) and mention he/she may have had contact with someone with whooping cough. Whooping cough can only spread through coughing, and those in the first few weeks of the illness should stay away from school until they have completed at least 5 days of an antibiotic. This is important to prevent further spread.

Whooping cough vaccine is routinely given with vaccinations at 2, 4, and 6 months of age with booster doses given at 18 months, 4 years of age and in the year 7 school program. It is also funded for pregnant women in their last trimester. A booster dose is also recommended for adults with a new baby in the household (but this is not a free dose). Vaccinations are available through either your family doctor or at a Community Health Clinic.

Yours sincerely,

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