

November 19, 2014 Health Update on Pertussis (whooping cough) at Roosevelt

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We had a number (23) of students diagnosed and treated for pertussis (whooping cough) during October and early November. A letter was sent out to the Roosevelt community on October 31 regarding this situation. A second letter was sent on November 13. If you didn't receive this email notification it could be that Roosevelt does not have your updated email, or that the email went into your spam folder.

Pertussis is a common, highly contagious, airborne bacteria. It starts as a mild cold but then causes deep prolonged coughing for many weeks. The severe coughing causes fatigue, trouble getting to sleep, rib pain and sometimes gagging and vomiting. For more information please go to:

<http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/about/index.html>.

Almost all of the students who had Pertussis were fully vaccinated for DTP and Tdap. Vaccines work best when everyone is vaccinated, because no vaccine is 100% effective (herd immunity). Parents should check their own Tdap booster status, as well as their child's. We will never know for sure how Pertussis got into our school population, but we have seen it with students participating in football, cheer squad, swimming, Hands for the Bridge, and drama.

We believe that all of the affected students were properly excluded from school and received the necessary antibiotic treatment. The school nurse and Teen Health Center nurse practitioners have kept in close contact with Seattle King County Department of Public Health to monitor these cases.

If you bring your child to your health care provider, it would be helpful for them to know the context of the situation here at Roosevelt. We have seen parents take their kids to the doctor twice for coughing, and were given allergy medicine, asthma medicine, or cough suppressants, rather than being suspected of having Pertussis.

The school nurse has reviewed the vaccination records of students who have not been immunized, or who are incompletely immunized and contacted their families. As a result several students got their Tdap booster vaccine.

We learned several lessons from this incident on ways that we can keep our community healthy.

- Please be sure we have updated phone or email contact information to assure that you receive important notices from school.
- Our community is safer and healthier when all of our students are immunized. Outbreaks can occur when a small number of students are unimmunized.
- Immunized students can still get Pertussis if they have enough exposure to the bacteria but the illness is milder than it would have been without immunization.
- When the school community is up-to-date on immunizations, students with chronic illness or life-threatening health conditions are protected from illnesses like Pertussis.
- All students can be better protected when we cover our coughs, pay attention to hand-washing techniques and asking students to stay home when we are ill.

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Thank you for helping to keep our community healthy

For more information, please contact me at 206-252-4817 or shoag@seattleschools.org.

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