

DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH • COMMUNICABLE DISEASE • LABORATORY SERVICES
Fred S. Schwartz, M.D., Public Health Officer • Lynn Murrin, PHM, CLS, ASCP, Laboratory Director

July 2, 2010

Dear Camp Director,

As you may know, Marin County and other counties in California are experiencing outbreaks of Pertussis, also known as Whooping Cough. For calendar year 2010, as of June 30, 202 cases have been reported in Marin, with most of these in the elementary and middle school age groups. While the incidence of new cases in Marin appears to be waning since a peak in late May/early June, it is possible that pertussis will occur among some children or staff in camp programs this summer. There are several measures camps can take to reduce the likelihood of pertussis transmission this summer:

- **For Parents and Staff: All campers and staff should be up to date on pertussis immunization. In addition to the early childhood series, a booster vaccine (Tdap) is recommended at age 10-11, and up to age 64, for those who have not received it. This vaccine provides protection against tetanus and diphtheria as well as pertussis.**
- **Campers or staff with characteristic cough illness (see below) should not attend camp until medically cleared.**
- **Basic prevention measures also include covering your cough, avoiding direct contact with respiratory and nasal secretions (see Exposure, below), and good hand washing with soap and warm water (alcohol based hand sanitizers when soap and warm water not available).**

Pertussis is a vaccine preventable disease, although protection from the vaccine begins to wane after 3-5 years. Pertussis is diagnosed based on clinical presentation and laboratory tests.

Incubation period (from exposure to onset of symptoms): Typically 7-10 days (range of 5-21 days).

Infectious period: From onset of any cold-like symptoms **until after 5 days of antibiotic treatment**, or until 21 days after onset of paroxysmal cough if no (or partial) treatment is given. Campers or staff with pertussis can return to camp once the infectious period is over, although cough may continue for several weeks.

Symptoms: Classic pertussis usually lasts 6-10 weeks.

“Catarrhal Stage”: The illness usually begins with cold like symptoms (runny nose, sneezing, occasional cough) lasting 1-2 weeks. Fever is absent or minimal.

“Paroxysmal Stage”: Cough becomes worse, with spasms of coughing followed by a sudden deep inspiration, often resulting in a characteristic “whooping” noise. Vomiting or gagging after coughing is common. This stage can last 5 weeks. Infants less than 6 months of age may worsen more rapidly, may gag, gasp, or stop breathing, and may not “whoop”. Adolescents are likely to have milder illness.

“Convalescent Stage”: Cough, whooping, and vomiting decrease over the next 3-7 weeks.

Exposure:

Close contacts would be those who have had direct contact with respiratory, oral, or nasal secretions from a symptomatic case, e.g., a cough or sneeze in the face, sharing food/eating utensils, kissing, performing a medical examination of the nose and throat, or sharing a confined space in close proximity for a prolonged period of time (≥1 hour) with a symptomatic case.

Contacts at high risk for severe pertussis disease and adverse outcomes include: infants <6 months of age, particularly premature infants, pregnant or recently post-partum women, unimmunized infants and children, immunocompromised persons, persons with neuromuscular disease, persons who have severe underlying disease such as chronic lung disease or cystic fibrosis. Contacts considered high risk because they may transmit pertussis to a high risk person include healthcare or childcare workers.

Treatment and Prophylaxis:

Several different antibiotics may be used to treat the disease, or for prevention in close contacts, with a five day course of Azithromycin being the most common.

Resources:

CA Dept. of Public Health Pertussis Website: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Pertussis.aspx>

Flyers for Parents in English and Spanish are attached.

Marin County Department of Health and Human Services Communicable Disease Prevention and Control Public Health Nurse:

415-473-2623; 415-473-7805; 415-473-4163

Sincerely,

Fred Schwartz, M.D.
Public Health Officer, County of Marin