Tuesday 28th August 2012

Dear Parent/Caregiver,

Charleville State High School takes the health, safety and wellbeing of the members of our school community very seriously, and at this time of year many of our community fall ill with the usual range of seasonal colds and flu. Unfortunately, some more serious conditions also occur which require all members of our school community to be aware of precautions and exclusion requirements.

The school has today been notified of a confirmed case of Whooping Cough within our school community. This means that those who have been exposed to the infection have been excluded from attending school until they have received five (5) days of appropriate antibiotics and are given clearance from their doctor that they are not infectious themselves.

I have attached a Public Health Factsheet on Whooping Cough (or Pertussis) for your information. You will note that Whooping Cough may start like a cold, with a runny nose, sneezing and tiredness before the characteristic coughing develops. If you or any member of your household is feeling at all sick with any of these symptoms, please seek the advice of your Doctor or call the 13HEALTH information line (13 43 25 84).

Similarly, if your child comes in contact with an infectious case of Whooping Cough and has not had a Pertussis (Whooping Cough) booster in the last ten years, please seek medical advice and let the school know that you will be keeping them home in line with that advice.

If you require any further information regarding Whooping Cough, or other Public Health concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the Charleville Public Health Unit on 07 4656 8100, the 13HEALTH information line (13 43 25 84) or your Doctor.

Please let the school know (07 4656 8888) if you are keeping your child home due to illness or possible infection, so that their absences can be explained and our records kept up to date. If we can provide any other support for children who are kept at home due to illness – for example, provision of work while they are away – please do not hesitate to contact your child’s Year Level Coordinator.

 Regards

Andrew Pierpoint
Principal
Whooping Cough (Pertussis)

Description:
Whooping cough (or pertussis) is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by the bacterium Bordetella pertussis. It can affect babies, children, adolescents and adults. For adolescents and adults the infection may only cause an irritating, persistent cough. However, whooping cough can be life threatening for babies and young children, particularly those not fully protected by vaccination. During coughing attacks, a baby or child’s breathing can be obstructed and they may become blue or stop breathing.

Symptoms:
Whooping cough may start like a cold, with a runny nose, sneezing and tiredness, and then the characteristic cough develops. These coughing bouts can be very severe and frightening, and may end with a crowing noise (the whoop). This occurs as air is drawn back into the chest, and can be followed by vomiting or gagging. Bouts of coughing may continue for many weeks even after treatment.

Infants under six months of age, vaccinated children, adolescents and adults often don’t have the typical whoop.

Transmission:
Whooping cough bacteria are highly infectious and are spread to other people by an infected person coughing and sneezing. The infection can also be passed on through direct contact with infected secretions from the mouth or nose. The time between exposure to the bacteria and getting sick is usually seven to ten days, but can be up to three weeks.

A person is most infectious in the early stages of their illness. Unless treated with antibiotics, a person is regarded as infectious for three weeks after the cough began.

Treatment:
Treatment is a full course of antibiotics which reduces the time a person is infectious to others. Antibiotics need to be given within 21 days of the start of general symptoms or within 14 days of the start of coughing. Antibiotics may reduce symptoms if given early.

Some people who have had close contact with an infected person may need to take antibiotics to prevent infection. This includes people at high risk of serious complications (eg. children aged less than one year who are not fully vaccinated and women near the end of their pregnancy) and others who live or work with people at risk.

Control
A person with whooping cough should stay away from work, school, preschool and childcare until they have had at least 5 days of their course of antibiotics, or until 21 days after the cough began.

If children who have had less than three doses of whooping cough vaccine are close contacts of an infected person, they should stay away from preschool and childcare until they have taken a full course of antibiotics, or for 14 days after their last exposure to the infected person.

Prevention:
Vaccination is the most effective way to prevent whooping cough. The vaccine is recommended and available free for:

- all children at 2, 4 and 6 months of age and 4 years of age. Vaccines due at 2 months of age can be given from 6 weeks, and those due at 4 years can be given from 3 years 6 months
- Year 10 students (booster).

A booster dose is also recommended for any adults who haven’t had a previous booster, particularly:
Whooping Cough (Pertussis)

- parents planning a pregnancy, or as soon as the baby is born
- anyone working with or caring for babies and young children, especially healthcare workers, childcare workers and grandparents.

Help and Assistance
For further information please contact your local doctor, community health centre, nearest public health unit or the 13HEALTH information line (13 43 25 84).

Other Resources and Related Content
Immunise Australia website

Whooping cough and immunisation - Queensland Health fact sheet

References