



May 9, 2016

Dear Parent or Guardian,

A second 8<sup>th</sup> grade student at Gravelly Hills has been diagnosed with pertussis. Both students are fully vaccinated. You are getting this letter because your child is considered to be a close contact to this student.

Pertussis is an infection that affects the airways and is easily spread from person-to-person by coughing or sneezing. Pertussis is most commonly spread when a person is within 3 feet of a pertussis case. The longer the contact exists, the more likely that pertussis will spread. Its severe cough can last for weeks or months, sometimes leading to coughing fits and/or vomiting. Anyone can get pertussis, but it can be very dangerous for infants and people with weakened immune systems. Family members with pertussis, especially mothers, can spread pertussis to newborns. Unvaccinated persons are especially susceptible.

**Recommendations:**

**1. If your child has a cough:**

- Keep your child home from school and activities, such as sports, parties, church or other group activities.
- Make an appointment with your child's doctor as soon as possible and tell the doctor that your child may have been exposed to pertussis.
- a) If your child is diagnosed with pertussis:
  - Tell the school that your child has been diagnosed with pertussis.
  - Your child will need to stay home from school and activities, such as sports or church until your child has been on antibiotics for 5 days to treat pertussis.
  - Ask your child's doctor to notify the Orange County Health Department of the diagnosis.
- b) If your child's doctor says your child does NOT have pertussis:
  - Ask for a note from the doctor telling the school that your child's cough is NOT pertussis and that your child can return to school and other activities at any time.

**2: If you child does not have a cough:**

- a) Giving preventive medication to contacts of a pertussis case is recommended if the contact is at high risk of developing severe pertussis or is a close contact to someone at high risk of developing severe pertussis.
  - If your child has a health condition that may be worsened by a pertussis infection, ask your child's doctor about antibiotics to prevent pertussis. Antibiotics should be considered for a child with a weakened immune system or a child with moderate to severe medically treated asthma.
  - If your child lives with any of the following people, ask your child's medical provider to prescribe antibiotics, even if he or she is not coughing:
    - A pregnant woman,
    - An infant younger than 12 months old
    - Anyone with a pre-existing health condition that places them at risk of severe illness or complications, or

---

**Southern Human Services Center**

2501 Homestead Road · Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Phone: 919.245.2400 | General Fax: 919.969.4777 | Confidential Fax: 919.968.2013

[www.orangecountync.gov/health](http://www.orangecountync.gov/health)



- Persons who work in settings with high risk infants or pregnant women such as hospital nurseries, childcare settings or maternity wards/clinics
- b) **If you child does not have a cough and is not considered to be in a high risk group** (as described above) your child does not need to take preventative antibiotics. Please be alert for symptoms in your child and be ready to have him/her evaluated by a medical provider if symptoms occur.

Please make sure your family's vaccinations are up-to-date. Protection against pertussis from the childhood vaccine, DTaP, decreases over time. Older children and adults, including pregnant women, should get a pertussis booster shot called "Tdap" to protect themselves and infants near or around them. If you need the Tdap vaccine, contact your medical provider or call Orange County Health Department for an appointment.

The student with pertussis was last in school and infectious on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, prior to being diagnosed. Since pertussis can take up to 3 weeks to develop, please monitor your child for symptoms through May 13<sup>th</sup>.

If you bring your child to a doctor for pertussis, please show this letter to him or her. If you have any questions or concerns please contact your medical provider or you can call Orange County Health Department at 919-245-2400 and ask to speak to a communicable disease nurse. Also, for more information, go to [www.cdc.gov/pertussis](http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis)

Thank you,

Colleen Bridger, MPH, PhD  
Health Director



**Dear Medical Provider,**

Your patient may have been exposed to pertussis.

**For Exposed Patients without Symptoms:**

As a precaution and to protect vulnerable individuals, we are recommending antibiotic prophylaxis for this patient if he or she has a pre-existing condition that places him/her at high risk of developing severe pertussis or its complications. Similarly we recommend antibiotic prophylaxis for this person if he/she shares a household with:

- a woman who is pregnant
- an infant less than 12 months old
- a person at high risk of developing severe pertussis due to a pre-existing illness
- a person who works with high risk individuals (i.e. nursery workers, childcare workers, maternity ward/clinic workers)

**For Exposed Patients with Symptoms:** Orange County Health Department recommends that you follow these CDC guidelines:

**For patients coughing <21 days:**

1. Collect nasopharyngeal swabs or aspirate for pertussis PCR testing and/or culture.
2. Do not delay treatment with appropriate antibiotics while waiting for laboratory results if there is no alternative diagnosis.
3. Document and communicate all clinical decisions related to pertussis to the school (this includes children for whom pertussis has been ruled out).
4. Strongly consider antibiotic prophylaxis for all household members if a pregnant woman, an infant less than 12 months old, or anyone with a weakened immune system lives in the household.

**For patients coughing ≥21 days:**

1. Testing for pertussis is not recommended. Testing after 3 weeks of cough is of limited benefit since PCR and culture are only sensitive during the first 2-3 weeks of cough when bacterial DNA is still present in the nasopharynx.
2. Treatment is no longer necessary after 21 days, with the following exception: infants and pregnant women in their third trimester should be treated up through 6 weeks after cough onset.
3. The patient is no longer infectious and can return to school.

**For all households:** Administer Tdap vaccine to contacts 11 years and older who have not been previously vaccinated with Tdap.



ORANGE COUNTY  
HEALTH DEPARTMENT

*Improving health. Inspiring change.*

**Dr. Colleen Bridger, MPH, PhD**  
**Health Director**

---

Additional clinical and laboratory guidance may be found on the CDC website:  
<http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis>. Should you have any questions or concerns, please call Orange County Health Department at 919-245-2400 and ask to speak to a Communicable Disease nurse.

---

**Southern Human Services Center**

2501 Homestead Road · Chapel Hill, NC 27514

Phone: 919.245.2400 | General Fax: 919.969.4777 | Confidential Fax: 919.968.2013

[www.orangecountync.gov/health](http://www.orangecountync.gov/health)