[date]

Dear Parent or Guardian:

Your child may have been exposed to pertussis (whooping cough). Pertussis is a highly contagious illness that begins with mild, cold-like symptoms including cough and runny nose. These first symptoms typically appear seven to ten days after a person is exposed. The cough worsens over the following weeks, and coughing spells may last several seconds. As individuals infected with pertussis catch their breath at the end of each coughing spell, they may loudly gasp (“whoop”) and vomit or choke. Some individuals with pertussis may have very mild symptoms and may not realize that they are sick or contagious. Pertussis is most severe in infants less than one year old.

Pertussis is spread through coughing or sneezing directly into someone’s face. It can also be spread by sharing food with or kissing someone with pertussis.

If diagnosed early, pertussis is treated with an antibiotic. Students who are prescribed antibiotics for suspected pertussis can return to school following the fifth day of treatment. Without antibiotics, a person with pertussis is considered contagious for three weeks and must remain out of school for that length of time. It is important that ill students stay at home away from others (especially infants, pregnant women, and young children).

Pertussis vaccine is administered in combination with diphtheria and tetanus vaccine (DTaP) in a five-dose series and protects children against whooping cough until around the age of ten years. A “booster” is recommended for adults and adolescents (Tdap). Check with your healthcare provider to make sure both your child’s and your shots are up-to-date.

Please watch your child for any symptoms of pertussis over the next three weeks. If you notice any of the symptoms mentioned above in your child, please take your child to your medical provider right away, taking this letter with you. Also, please notify your child’s teacher or school nurse as soon as possible.

If you have questions, please contact the County of Monterey Health Department’s Communicable Disease Unit at 831-755-4521.