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WHOOPIING COUGH NOTIFICATION LETTER

From: Ken Cutler, MD, MPH, Health Officer, Nevada County

Dear Parents, Guardians, and School Staff:

This letter is to inform you that the recent whooping cough outbreak (also called pertussis) in Western Nevada County is now considered widespread. To date, the Nevada County Public Health Department has received reports of a total 12 cases of whooping cough, 11 of which are in school-age children and these children attend 7 different schools in the area. Therefore, it can be assumed that any local school is susceptible to the outbreak. Whooping cough outbreaks are difficult to contain because the infection often looks like a cold when it starts (and we are in the midst of cold and flu season with multiple upper respiratory viruses around as well—not every cough is whooping cough). Also, people with whooping cough are contagious from the start of their symptoms until three weeks of cough or until they have been treated with an appropriate antibiotic for 5 days. After exposure, symptoms usually appear 7-10 days later but up to 21 days later.

People with whooping cough may have coughing spells in which they can't catch their breath between coughs. As they catch their breath at the end of a coughing spell, they may loudly gasp ("whoop") and vomit or feel like they are choking. Young babies with whooping cough may not have a cough but may have trouble breathing and gag, gasp, turn color or vomit. There is usually no fever with whooping cough. Whooping cough is very contagious. The vaccine usually protects against whooping cough but is not 100% effective and immunity from the vaccine wanes over time. Many teens and adults have not received the recommended Tdap booster for whooping cough. Unvaccinated and under-vaccinated people are at higher risk for the infection and for more severe infection. To protect your health and the health of our community, please check your and your child's immunization status and get any needed vaccinations or boosters. It is now recommended that women receive a whooping cough booster with each pregnancy.

Antibiotics can prevent the spread of whooping cough and are recommended for those with whooping cough and for their household contacts and for some contacts who are at high risk of becoming very sick or take care (healthcare workers, babysitters, grandparents, etc.) of those at high risk for getting sick. Those at high risk are babies and infants less than a year of age, pregnant women (particularly in the third trimester), and those with weakened immune systems. Babies should be kept away from people with a cough if at all possible and babies with any trouble breathing or a coughing illness should be checked by a doctor right away.

If a child has symptoms of whooping cough (pertussis), it is recommended that he/she not go to school until evaluated by a healthcare professional. If pertussis is suspected and the cough has been for less than 3 weeks, the child should be excluded from school and activities until a lab test has ruled out pertussis, or until 5 days of antibiotics are completed, or until 21 days from cough onset if there is no testing or

treatment. Pertussis is infectious during the first 3 weeks of cough. Treatment and school exclusion are not recommended after that time although the cough may persist for much longer.

The Nevada County Public Health Department will continue to investigate the outbreak and work closely with the schools to help mitigate it. More information on whooping cough is available on the California Department of Public Health website at: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Pertussis.aspx> and on the Nevada County website: <http://www.mynevadacounty.com/nc/hhsa/ph>.

The school contact for more information is Sharyn Turner, Nevada County Superintendent of Schools Health Coordinator: (530) 478-6400.