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Dear Parent or Guardian,

As a community health precaution, we are sending this letter out to inform you we have had a small number of students diagnosed with Pertussis, commonly known as Whooping Cough, in our district. If your child's immunizations are up to date, he or she has the best protection available.

Pertussis is very easily spread from person to person through coughing, sneezing or contact with mucus from the nose and throat. Once infected and if not treated, a person with Pertussis can pass the infection to others for 3-4 weeks.

**Symptoms or signs of Pertussis include:**

- Cough, runny nose, sneezing, mild fever (cold-like symptoms) followed by a persistent cough. The persistent cough occurs in explosive bursts.
- In adolescents and adults, pertussis may cause only mild cold-like symptoms or it may appear as repeated "hard" or violent coughs. In some adolescents and adults, the only symptom may be a persistent cough, often worse at night.
- The "fits" of cough can be hard enough to cause sweating, exhaustion, bulging eyes, breathing difficulty, vomiting or gagging.
- The Pertussis cough may be followed by a high pitched "whoop" when breathing in. Hence the "Whooping Cough" name.
- Between bursts of coughing, people with Pertussis may appear well.

Anyone with a cough lasting longer than seven days and any of the signs listed above should check with a personal health care provider or health clinic. Everyone should practice good illness prevention like frequent hand washing, covering a cough and/or sneeze with one's arm and staying home if ill.

The most effective prevention is vaccination. People between the ages of 10 and 64 can get the Tdap vaccine. If your child is age 10, it would be a good time to schedule a vaccination.

Infants under the age of 1, even if immunized, are not considered immune. Pregnant women and parents of infants under age 1 should be immunized to protect their child.

For students in public schools, Washington State requires evidence of Pertussis vaccination – the DTaP vaccine for entering Kindergarten and Pre-School and the Tdap vaccine for students in 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grades. The Tetanus booster without pertussis will not protect students and does not meet state requirements.

A licensed health care provider and parents or guardians must sign a "certificate of exemption form" if they choose to exempt their child from vaccinations for medical or religious reasons.

Information on Pertussis is available from your healthcare provider, Benton Franklin Health District Disease Information Line(509) 460-4501, or the Washington State Department of Health Website at <http://www.doh.wa.gov/EHSPHL/factsheet/pertussis.htm>.