04/04/2011
Dear Parents & Staff,

Re: Pertussis (whooping cough)

There has been a confirmed case of Pertussis (also known as whooping cough) at Keiraville Public School and it is possible your child may have been exposed to the infection. Although the risk of spread to your child is small, we ask that you watch out for the symptoms of pertussis in your child, especially over the next 3 weeks.

What is pertussis and what are the symptoms?
Pertussis is a highly contagious bacterial infection, which can be a very serious illness in infants. It is spread by droplets produced by coughing and sneezing. The first symptom is usually a runny nose followed by a cough which becomes worse and may last for months. Pertussis should be suspected when anyone who has:

- coughing occurring in spasms, often followed by vomiting or
- a whoop, a sudden noisy in-drawing of breath at the end of coughing or
- a cough that lasts for two weeks or longer. Adults and children may have a persistent cough only
- Small babies may go very red, perhaps blue or stop breathing during coughing attacks

What should people with symptoms of pertussis do?
If your child or any member of your family has the above symptoms, please contact your family doctor and take this letter with you, as soon as possible.

This is extremely important if there is a baby less than 12 months of age living in the household.

Your doctor can advise whether pertussis is likely and arrange for testing and treatment if needed. If there are no symptoms, testing is not required. Untreated, a person with pertussis can spread it to other people from the time of first symptoms up to three weeks after they begin coughing. Treatment with a course of an appropriate antibiotic can stop the infection spreading by shortening this infectious period and is more effective if started early.

How is pertussis prevented?
To help prevent the infection spreading, children who have been diagnosed with pertussis should not attend school or childcare until they have completed at least 5 days of the recommended antibiotic course, or for 3 weeks after the onset of cough (which ever is earlier).

Vaccination is the most important way of reducing pertussis in our community. A booster dose of pertussis-containing vaccine (DTPa) is due at 4 years of age and a pertussis-containing vaccine is now available for adolescents and adults.

It is important to double check that your child is fully up to date with their immunisations against pertussis. If in doubt, please ask your doctor to check.

Need more information?
A pertussis fact sheet is attached to this letter. If you or your doctor have any further questions please call the Infectious Diseases team at the Public Health Unit on 4221 6700.

Yours sincerely

Professor Mark J Ferson MPH MD FRACP FAFPHM
Director/Medical Officer of Health