27 July 2015

Dear Parent,

A number of children from Balgowlah North Public School have been diagnosed with pertussis (whooping cough). I am writing to provide advice and to ask that you watch out for the symptoms of pertussis in your child, especially over the next 3 weeks.

**What is pertussis?**

Pertussis is an infection of the throat that can cause bouts of coughing, and sometimes breathing difficulties and vomiting. It usually starts with a snuffle or a cold. Symptoms can last for many weeks. Pertussis can be very serious in small children.

**What should people who develop pertussis symptoms do?**

If your child develops symptoms (as described in the enclosed factsheet), please take them and this letter to your local doctor as soon as possible. Your doctor can advise whether pertussis is likely and arrange for early treatment if needed. Treating people who have pertussis with antibiotics can stop the infection spreading, but is more effective if started early.

To help prevent this infection spreading, people who have been diagnosed with pertussis should not attend school until they have completed the first 5 days of a course of the recommended antibiotics. If antibiotics cannot be taken, then they must stay away for 3 weeks after the start of the cough.

Families with young babies aged less than 6 months and pregnant women in their last month of pregnancy should be particularly careful and see their doctor if anyone develops symptoms within the family.

**How is it prevented?**

Vaccination is the most important way of reducing pertussis in our community. Children who have not received at least 3 doses of pertussis vaccine can have severe disease. Pertussis vaccine is included in the routine childhood vaccination schedule at 2, 4 and 6 months (Infanrix hexa), 3.5- 4 years (Infanrix – IPV) and in Year 7 (Boostrix). It is important to double check that your child is fully up to date with his or her immunisations against pertussis. If in doubt, please ask your doctor to check.

For further information please contact the Public Health Unit on (02) 9477 9187.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Louise Baker
Public Health Nurse