Dear Parent/Carer

RE: PERTUSSIS (WHOOPING COUGH)

The North Coast Public Health Division (Port Macquarie) has been notified of a child diagnosed with whooping cough who attends Southern Cross School. Whooping cough (Pertussis) is a bacterial respiratory infection that can be serious in young children particularly those aged less than two years.

Please be on the lookout for symptoms of whooping cough:
- a runny nose, followed by a cough, which becomes worse (older children and adults may have only a cough that can last for several months)
- a cough that occurs in spasms, which may be followed by vomiting
- a cough with a 'whoop' (a sudden noisy gasp at the end of coughing)

In order to prevent further cases, if your child or any member of your family has symptoms of whooping cough please see your doctor and take this notice with you. This is extremely important if there is a baby less than 12 months of age living in the household. Pertussis can be a serious life-threatening infection for babies.

If your doctor diagnoses whooping cough in its early infectious stage (within 3 weeks of the cough starting), please advise the school and keep your child at home until they have taken 5 days of antibiotics.

Immunisation reduces the risk of infection, however the vaccine does not give lifelong protection, and reinforcement can occur. The vaccine is provided free of charge for infants at 2, 4 and 6 months and again at 4 years (the first dose can be given as early as 6 weeks of age). Please check that your child has received this primary course. If your child has not been fully immunised, discuss a catch-up plan with your doctor.

Because pertussis immunity wanes over time, many older children and adults are susceptible to infection and can be the source of new infections in infants.

- For a limited time, FREE pertussis (dTPa) vaccine is available for all new parents, grandparents and any other adults who will regularly care for infants less than 12 months of age.
- Free vaccine will also be provided to Year 7 and 10 students as part of the NSW School-based Vaccination Program from 2009.

If you would like further information on whooping cough, please visit the website http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/PublicHealth/infectiousdiseases/whoopingcough/index.asp or contact your local Public Health Unit (02) 6520 7500.

Thank you

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