WHOOPING COUGH (PERTUSSIS) NOTIFICATION LETTER FOR SCHOOLS

Dear Parents and Guardians:

This letter is to inform you that a student who attends Labette County High School with your child has been diagnosed with whooping cough (also called pertussis). Whooping cough is a bacterial infection that is spread in the air by droplets produced during sneezing or coughing. It is very contagious. If not treated, whooping cough can spread easily to others. The early symptoms of pertussis often begin like a cold, with a runny nose, sneezing, fever and cough which can lasts 1 to 2 weeks. The cough gradually becomes worse.

The next stage of pertussis includes uncontrolled coughing spells followed by a whooping noise when a person breathes in. During these severe coughing spells, a person may vomit, or their lips or face may look blue from a lack of oxygen. Between coughing spells, a person may appear well. The coughing spells may be so bad that it is hard for babies to eat, drink or breathe. This stage usually lasts 4-6 weeks. Young babies with whooping cough may not have a cough. Instead they may have trouble breathing and gag, gasp, turn blue or vomit. There is usually no fever with whooping cough.

Whooping cough is very contagious. The vaccine usually protects against whooping cough. But older children, teenagers and adults who were completely immunized before they started kindergarten can get whooping cough because protection from the vaccine wears off over time. This is why a booster dose of vaccine, called Tdap, is recommended for those 11-18 years of age and for adults. Check with your healthcare provider to be sure you and your children are up to date with vaccine.

Antibiotics can prevent the spread of whooping cough and are recommended for those with whooping cough. Antibiotics are also recommended for people after exposure to an infectious pertussis patient, antibiotics should be given to persons at high risk of developing severe pertussis, (e.g., babies), persons who will have close contact with those at high risk of developing severe pertussis, (e.g., pregnant women or people who have contact with infants), and all household contacts within 21 days of cough onset in the patient with pertussis.

If your child has symptoms of a cold; runny nose, sneezing, fever, and/or coughing, contact your healthcare provider for evaluation and possible antibiotic treatment. Let the provider know your child may have been exposed to pertussis. If diagnosed with pertussis, your child will need to stay home from school until five days of antibiotics have been completed.

Children under one year of age, and especially those under six months of age, are most likely to get very sick if they develop whooping cough. Babies should be kept away from people with a cough if at all possible. Babies with any trouble breathing or with a coughing illness should be checked by a doctor right away.
Public Health of Labette County (health department) will continue to investigate the situation. If you or your doctor has any questions, please call Labette County High School at (620) 784-5321 or Public Health of Labette County (health department) at (620) 421-4350.

Sincerely,
Shane Holtzman, Principal