Dear Parent or Guardian:

The New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) has identified a cluster of pertussis cases among several students who attend the 7th grade at Packer Collegiate Institute since December. If your child is in the 7th grade, he/she may have been exposed to pertussis.

Pertussis is an infection that affects the airways and is easily spread from person to person by coughing or sneezing. Its severe cough can last for weeks or months, sometimes leading to coughing fits and/or vomiting. Anyone can get pertussis, but it can be very dangerous for infants and people with weakened immune systems. Family members with pertussis, especially mothers, can spread pertussis to newborns.

The DOHMH recommends the following for students who are in the 7th grade:

1. If your child has a cough:
   - Keep your child home from school and activities, such as sports or play groups. See item 3 and 4 about when your child can return to these activities.
   - Make an appointment with your child’s doctor as soon as possible and tell the doctor that your child may have been exposed to pertussis.

2. Ask your child’s doctor to prescribe your child antibiotics, even if he or she is not coughing if:
   - Your child has been told by a doctor that they have a weakened immune system.
   - Your child lives with any of the following high-risk people:
     - A woman who is pregnant,
     - An infant younger than 12 months old, or
     - Anyone with a weakened immune system.

3. If your child has been diagnosed with pertussis by his or her doctor:
   - Tell the school nurse (718-250-0259) that your child has been diagnosed with pertussis.
   - School officials may request that you keep your child home from school and activities, such as sports or play groups, until your child has been on antibiotics for five days to treat pertussis.
   - Ask your child’s doctor for a note for school that states your child has pertussis.

4. If your child’s doctor says your child does NOT have pertussis:
   - Ask for a note from the doctor telling the school that your child’s cough is NOT pertussis and that your child can return to school and other activities at any time.

Please make sure your family’s vaccinations are up-to-date. Protection against pertussis from the childhood vaccine, DTaP, decreases over time. Older children and adults, including pregnant women, should get a pertussis booster shot called “Tdap” to protect themselves and infants near or around them. If you need the Tdap vaccine, contact your doctor to find a vaccine provider near you.

If you bring your child to a doctor for pertussis, please show the reverse side of this letter to him or her. If you have any questions or concerns, please call us at 347-396-2402.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Rosen, MD
Bureau of Immunization
February 20, 2015

Dear Colleague:

Your patient may have been exposed to pertussis. Pertussis is characterized by a cough lasting ≥2 weeks with paroxysms, post-tussive vomiting, whoop or apnea.

**For Exposed Patients without Symptoms:**
As a precaution to protect vulnerable individuals, the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) recommends antibiotic prophylaxis for this patient if he or she is immune compromised or if they share a household with a woman who is pregnant, an infant less than 12 months old, or someone who is immune compromised to help prevent pertussis.

**For Exposed Patients with Symptoms:**
DOHMH recommends the following guidelines for assessing and treating patients at this time:

- **For patients coughing <21 days:**
  1. Collect nasopharyngeal swabs or aspirate for pertussis PCR testing and/or culture.
  2. Do not delay treatment with appropriate antibiotics while waiting for laboratory results if there is no alternative diagnosis.
  3. Document and communicate all clinical decisions related to pertussis to the school nurse at 718-250-0259 (this includes children for whom pertussis has been ruled out).
  4. Strongly consider giving antibiotic prophylaxis for all household members if a pregnant woman, an infant less than 12 months old, or anyone with a weakened immune system lives in the household.

- **For patients coughing ≥21 days:**
  1. Testing for pertussis is not recommended. Testing after 3 weeks of cough is of limited benefit since PCR and culture are only sensitive during the first 2-3 weeks of cough when bacterial DNA is still present in the nasopharynx.
  2. Treatment is no longer necessary after 21 days of cough, with the following exception: infants and pregnant women in their third trimester should be treated up through 6 weeks after cough onset.
  3. The patient is no longer infectious and can return to school.

**For all households:** Administer Tdap vaccine to contacts 11 years and older who have not been previously vaccinated with Tdap, or refer for vaccination.

Additional clinical and laboratory guidance may be found on the CDC website: [www.cdc.gov/pertussis](http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis).

Please report all suspected cases of pertussis to the NYC DOHMH at the time of initial clinical suspicion at: 1-888-692-3641. If you have questions, please call the DOHMH, Bureau of Immunization at 347-396-2402.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Rosen, MD
Bureau of Immunization