April 17, 2015

Dear Parent or Guardian:

The City of Long Beach Health Department is seeing an increase of whooping cough (pertussis) cases, especially among school-aged children. Pertussis is treatable and there is a safe and effective vaccine (Tdap) available. If left untreated, severe disease such as pneumonia may develop. Parents need to be aware of the symptoms and keep their children up-to-date with their immunizations.

Pertussis initially starts with cold-like symptoms (runny nose, watery eyes), but then leads to a severe and long-lasting cough, which often comes in spasms. The pertussis vaccine usually protects against infection, but sometimes even immunized children can get pertussis. If your child has not received the pertussis booster (Tdap), please take him/her to the doctor soon to get the vaccine.

Pertussis spreads when germs pass from an infected person to others through coughing or sneezing. Many infants who get whooping cough catch it from their older siblings (brothers or sisters) or from their parents or guardians who might not know that they have the disease. Pertussis is treatable with antibiotics; treatment can also prevent spread of the infection to others. Please monitor your child for symptoms of pertussis, which could be a persistent cough lasting longer than 3 days. If he/she develops symptoms, please do not send them to school. Take him/her to their doctor right away for a test and treatment for pertussis. If your child’s doctor suspects pertussis, please do not have your child return to school until the treatment is completed.

If you or your doctor has any questions, please call the Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services Epidemiology Program at (562) 570-4302.