Dear Parent or Guardian,

This letter is to inform you that a case of pertussis (whooping cough) has been identified in an individual in childcare center/school. Because your child may have been exposed to pertussis, I am providing you with information on this contagious disease.

Pertussis is a contagious illness that begins with mild symptoms similar to the common cold, such as runny nose and cough. The cough typically worsens over the next 2-3 weeks and people may cough in spasms, or fits, that may be followed by a “whooping” sound. Coughing fits are sometimes followed by vomiting. Some people with pertussis, particularly older children and adults, may have very mild symptoms and may not realize they are sick or contagious.

In infants and young children, cough may not be present and instead they may have trouble breathing and may gag, gasp, turn blue, or vomit. Pertussis can cause severe illness in infants and children under the age of 1, including death.

Pertussis is spread when ill people cough and sneeze near others, especially in close spaces over long periods of time (such as within the same household). Symptoms usually appear within 7-10 days of exposure, but it can be as long as three weeks before symptoms begin. Please monitor your child for the next three weeks for cold-like symptoms. If your child develops cough, fever, or other signs of respiratory illness, s/he should be evaluated by a healthcare provider. Take this letter with you when you visit your provider.

The best means of protecting children against pertussis is to keep their vaccinations up to date, including periodic booster shots. Immunity against pertussis decreases as children previously immunized get older. Please check with your healthcare provider to make sure your child’s shots are up to date.

Pertussis is treated with antibiotics. If treated, a person with pertussis can return to normal activities such as school, work or sports five days after treatment is begun and although they may continue to cough for many weeks, they are no longer contagious. Without antibiotics, someone with pertussis is contagious for 3-4 weeks after coughing begins. It is important that ill students stay home while contagious.

If you have further questions, consult your healthcare provider or contact Epidemiology at the Spokane Regional Health District at (509) 324-1442. Please specifically mention the name of the school or childcare center that sent you this letter.

Sincerely,