

SACRAMENTO - State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson today praised the Legislature's swift passage of legislation to provide school districts an additional 30 days to verify that certain students are vaccinated against pertussis, also known as whooping cough.

"I'm grateful that the Legislature has recognized our schools need some extra time to meet the immunization deadline," Torlakson said. "We don't want to see students lose precious learning time or be turned away from classes at the start of school. I urge the Governor to sign this legislation, and continue to also urge parents to immunize their children as soon as possible, both to protect their health and to prevent the spread of this dangerous disease."

Whooping cough is a highly contagious disease that can be debilitating at any age and lethal to infants. California's current pertussis epidemic has killed 10 babies and stricken more than 11,000 people since last year. Pertussis got its nickname from the sound children make while gasping for air in-between coughs.

Legislation signed last year requires students entering or advancing to grades seven through twelve in the 2011-12 school year to be immunized with a pertussis vaccine booster called the tetanus toxoid, reduced diphtheria toxoid, and acellular pertussis (Tdap) vaccine. That new requirement went into effect this month and affects all students-current, new, and transfers-in public and private schools.

Senate Bill 614 (Kehoe) would grant local educational agencies an extra 30 days after classes begin to verify vaccinations of all seventh through twelfth grade students in California.

For more information on pertussis and Tdap, please visit the California Department of Education's Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ls/he/hn/pertussis.asp>.