



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Health Department Reports Increase in Pertussis Cases

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BURLINGTON – The Vermont Department of Health has alerted health care providers statewide about an increase in the number of cases of pertussis, a vaccine-preventable disease commonly known as whooping cough.

Twenty-seven cases of pertussis have been confirmed in Vermont this year, including six cases in the past month. Recent confirmed cases have been reported in Chittenden, (4), Washington (1), and Bennington (1) counties, with additional probable or suspected cases in Chittenden, Addison and Windham counties.

The age range of confirmed cases is from 5 months to 67 years old.

Pertussis is a highly contagious disease of the lungs caused by a bacterial infection. Anyone who has clinical symptoms of pertussis should be evaluated by their health care provider. People with suspected or confirmed cases of pertussis should be kept out of school, work, and group activities until five days of antibiotic therapy have been completed.

Household members and other close contacts of someone who has pertussis should receive antibiotics to prevent illness.

Serious complications from pertussis are most common among children under the age of 1, including pneumonia, encephalopathy (brain inflammation), and in rare cases, death.

“This is a good reminder for everyone to get vaccinated as the best defense against whooping cough, and to look for symptoms of the disease,” said Deputy State Epidemiologist Susan Schoenfeld. “We are seeing a resurgence in pertussis cases in other areas of the country, and this is a real concern for public health officials nationwide.”

A total of 8,300 cases were reported in California last year, including nine deaths of infants less than 2 months old.

The last widespread outbreak of pertussis in Vermont occurred in 1996 -1997. A total of 280 cases were identified in 1996, including 171 cases in school-aged children in 69 Vermont schools. In 1997, there were 283 cases.

The earlier a person – especially an infant – starts on treatment for whooping cough, the better. The infection usually begins with mild upper respiratory symptoms and an irritating cough that gradually worsens to include possible whooping, short periods without breathing, or vomiting.

School and child care entry laws in Vermont require multiple doses of a pertussis-containing vaccine, dependent on the age of the child. When pertussis is identified in a school, letters are often sent to parents to inform them of the illness, describe symptoms of pertussis, and encourage parents to have children with symptoms examined by a health care provider.

While immunization is the best protection against pertussis, it's possible for fully vaccinated children to develop pertussis, though they often have milder disease.

Immunity to the disease can also wane over time. The adolescent/adult pertussis booster vaccine (Tdap) should be given to all Vermonters ages 10 and older. Anyone who has close contact with infants is strongly urged to get the Tdap vaccine.

For more information about pertussis, visit the Health Department website at healthvermont.gov.

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