



Department of Health
Agency of Human Services



Whooping Cough Cases Way Down After Vaccination and Information Campaign

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BURLINGTON – Success in public health means that people stay well.

After a record 645 confirmed cases of whooping cough in Vermont during 2012, the number of cases is sharply down since mid-December when the Health Department reported epidemic numbers for the state.

To date in 2013, a total of 42 cases have been confirmed, compared to 89 cases reported during the same period for 2012.

On December 19, 'Vermont Tdap Vaccine Day', the Health Department's 12 district offices vaccinated 3,269 older children and adults against whooping cough. Since then hundreds more have been vaccinated at both the Health Department and health care provider offices.

"We can't declare the end of this outbreak, but we're thankful that Vermonters responded as they did to slow the spread of illness," said Health Commissioner Harry Chen, MD "Cases spiked at the end of the year and have steadily decreased since then. This is good proof that our vaccination and information efforts are working."

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a highly infectious bacterial disease that is easily spread from person to person by coughing or sneezing, and can be most serious for babies too young to be fully vaccinated.

For the best protection, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention recommends that everyone age 11 and older get a Tdap shot, and that women get the vaccine with each pregnancy. Babies need five doses of the vaccine called Dtap – at 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 15 to 18 months, and 4 to 6 years.

"The vaccine is not perfect – its effectiveness wanes over time," said Patsy Kelso, state epidemiologist for infectious disease. "This makes it all the more important for everyone who can be vaccinated to do so, both to protect yourself and to protect those who are too young or who have medical conditions that prevent them from being vaccinated."

Whooping Cough Outbreak Response

Health care providers, public health nurses, infectious disease epidemiologists, laboratory and public health preparedness staff have responded to the outbreak with a coordinated effort to inform, track, test, diagnose and treat cases, and encourage vaccination:

Vaccines for Children and Adults: The Health Department provides vaccine at no cost to all provider practices in the state who are enrolled in federal and state vaccination programs for children and adults. The Health Department's district offices offer vaccine to those who do not have access to a health care provider.

Disease Control: Public health nurses and epidemiologists investigate every reported case of pertussis. They gather information, identify additional cases or at-risk contacts, and consult with clinicians, patients and their families to provide information and guidance. Staff work closely with school nurses and child care providers on disease control strategies, and help write informational letters for parents.

Clinical Guidance: The Health Department uses a Health Alert Network system to regularly communicate with health care providers about public health issues, and guidelines for diagnosis, laboratory testing and treatment. Throughout the year, the Health Department provided pertussis alerts and guidance for clinicians to follow when treating patients and their close contacts.

Public Information: The Health Department's website at healthvermont.gov offers extensive information about whooping cough (pertussis) – including audio and video of the pertussis cough – and shares news and alerts via [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

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