



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, commonly known as whooping cough.

Nine cases of pertussis have been laboratory confirmed in Vermont, including five in the past two weeks. Pertussis is a highly contagious disease of the lungs caused by a bacterial infection.

“The number of cases of pertussis is not unusually high for this time of year, but it is a good reminder for parents, providers and school health officials to make sure children are fully vaccinated, and to look for symptoms of the disease,” said Health Commissioner Wendy Davis, MD. “Teenagers and adults should also check their records, since they are a frequent source of exposure to infection for infants and young children.”

School-entry laws in Vermont require a minimum of four doses of a pertussis-containing vaccine. 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 symptomatic children examined by a health care provider.

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.

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

Pertussis can also be contagious to people who were fully vaccinated as children but have not received a pertussis-containing vaccine in their teen or adult years. Immunity to the disease can wane over time. The adolescent/adult pertussis booster vaccine (Tdap) should be given one time to all Vermonters ages 10 through 64.

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. In the past decade, the highest number of cases of pertussis was 254 in 2000.

For more information about pertussis, visit the Health Department website at <http://healthvermont.gov>.

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