

News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Pertussis (Whooping Cough) outbreak identified in Clark County

(August 7, 2002) – The Clark County Health District is currently investigating an outbreak of pertussis (whooping cough) in Clark County occurring among adults and adolescents, as well as infants. To date, 14 cases of the disease have been confirmed in the county, including eight infants. Five of the infants who contracted the disease had to be hospitalized and two were placed on ventilators.

“Adults and older children who have been ill with a prolonged cough should avoid contact with infants and see a physician,” said Dr. Kwalick, chief health officer for the health district.

“Although, the disease may be mild in older children and adults, infants may experience complications such as pneumonia and inflammation of the brain. In rare cases pertussis can cause death, especially in children less than 1 year of age,” he said.

The vaccine for pertussis is given at 2, 4, 6, and 12 months of age, and again at 4 years of age. At least three to four doses are necessary to protect a child from the disease. There is no booster shot for pertussis and the immunity provided by the vaccine wanes over time. This can contribute to the spread of the disease if adults and older children who have a mild case of the illness inadvertently expose infants who have not completed the full immunization schedule.

Pertussis is a contagious respiratory disease caused by bacteria. Symptoms of the disease usually occur in stages. The first stage may begin with a runny nose, sneezing, low-grade fever and cough. The cough lasts one to two weeks and then becomes worse. The second stage of pertussis includes uncontrolled coughing spells followed by a whooping noise when a person breathes in. During these severe coughing spells a person may vomit, or their lips or face may look blue from lack of oxygen. This stage may last four to six weeks.

(more)

It is important to note infants may not exhibit all symptoms, including the characteristic whooping cough, and still be seriously ill. Illness can be prevented by avoiding contact with sick individuals. Antibiotics may also be used to prevent the disease if prescribed within three weeks of contact with someone who is sick.

For more information about the disease, call the Clark County Health District Office of Epidemiology at 383-1378. For immunization information contact the Immunization Clinic at 383-1351.

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