

MEDIA RELEASE

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RE: **Pertussis Cases On The Rise In Genesee County**

The Genesee County Health Department (GCHD) would like to remind residents of the importance of immunizations and the role they play in ensuring public health. Genesee County experienced an increase in pertussis cases in 2018. Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is a vaccine preventable disease that can be a very serious or even fatal illness. Young children, especially infants, are at the greatest risk for severe pertussis disease and serious complications. Often adolescents and adults spread the infection to young children. It is critical that adolescents and adults, especially those who have contact with infants and young children, are vaccinated against pertussis.

Pertussis, caused by the bacteria *Bordetella pertussis*, can be spread through sneezing and coughing. The time between exposure to the bacteria and disease symptoms is usually between 7-10 days, but in rare cases it can take as long as 3 weeks.

In the early stage of illness, pertussis can resemble a common cold. Symptoms include sneezing, runny nose, mild dry cough and low-grade fever. The disease is most contagious at this time. After about 1 to 2 weeks, more serious “coughing spells” develop that can last for more than a minute and result in difficulty breathing. Coughing spells may be intense and followed by a crowing or high-pitched whoop as the patient tries to take a breath. Infants less than 5 months



and adults often do not have the “whoop”. Coughing episodes may be severe and difficult to control and are more frequent at night. In some cases gagging and vomiting occur after coughing spells and the person may become blue in the face from lack of air. Between coughing spells the person often appears well.

The GCHD is reminding health care providers that pertussis is increasing in the community and to consider it in their diagnoses. Those diagnosed with pertussis should be treated with an appropriate antibiotic. Persons exposed to a case of pertussis should make sure that they are properly vaccinated against pertussis. In some situations, those in very close contact to a case of pertussis may need treatment to prevent the disease. Because no vaccine is 100% effective, it is important that treatment be given to those close contacts regardless of vaccination status.

Health care providers should also ensure that their patients are fully vaccinated. Vaccination against pertussis is the best way to control and prevent the disease. Immunity from the vaccine wanes over time so there is an important need for booster doses of pertussis vaccine (Tdap) in adolescence and adulthood (11-64 years old). The GCHD strongly recommends checking your immunization status, as well as your children’s, and obtaining boosters if needed.

Vaccination can occur through your personal physician or the Immunization Clinic (810-237-4540) at the GCHD Burton Branch. If you have been exposed to a confirmed case of pertussis it is important for you to contact your physician for possible, preventative treatment. Fact sheets, immunization office hours at the Health Department’s Burton Clinic, and additional information can be found at www.gchd.us. For more resources and information, please visit www.cdc.gov/pertussis

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