

Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency

August 2, 2012

Steve Todd, Health Officer

517-279-9561, ext. 148

Jo Ann Wilczynski, Prevention Services Dir.

517-279-9561, ext. 143

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Whooping Cough Back in the News

Coldwater, MI. Pertussis, also known as ‘Whooping Cough’ is back in the news. After a long hiatus, this common childhood disease has recently made national headlines. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), during the first half of 2012, 37 states have reported increases in the number of pertussis cases when compared to the same time period in 2011. In April, Washington State declared Pertussis an epidemic. As of July 28th, Washington State Health Department had reported a total of 3,285 cases for 2012. This number is up from 253 for the same period in 2011. They are also reporting nine infant deaths due to Pertussis. While the Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph County Community Health Agency has not seen an uptick in the number of Pertussis cases within the tri-county area, other surrounding county health departments are starting to report increased activity.

Pertussis is caused by a gram-negative bacterium that lives in the nose, mouth and throat of an infected person. It is spread from person to person through coughing and sneezing. The onset of the disease usually occurs within seven to ten days after exposure. During the initial stage the patient’s symptoms may appear the same as those of a cold or virus. Symptoms can include: runny nose, sneezing, low-grade fever and a mild cough. This stage may last up to two weeks.

The next stage may last up to six weeks. The patient’s symptoms worsen and are characterized by:

- A “whooping” sound as the patient tries to breathe during a coughing spell
- Coughs that usually produce thick mucus and/or cause vomiting
- Cyanosis or the bluing of the lips and nails, due to impaired oxygen intake
- Exhaustion

During the third stage, the patient begins to gradually recover. This stage, the convalescent stage, may last weeks or months even if no additional complications or secondary infections occur.

Pertussis is most dangerous to infants and very young children. According to Jo Ann Wilczynski, Prevention Services Director at the tri-county health department “In general, more than half the babies younger than 1 year of age who get pertussis will be hospitalized. Babies under one year are too young to be protected by the vaccines which they just start to receive at two months of age. In addition, adults and adolescents typically have a milder form of pertussis. This can make the disease harder to diagnose because symptoms can look like a cold with a nagging cough. But they can still spread the infection to others, including infants and young children. The best way to protect infants is to make sure that those around them, especially their mothers, are vaccinated.”

Immunization is the best defense against Pertussis. Universal vaccination of all children is now recommended. While the vaccination is not 100% effective, it has decreased the incidence of whooping cough by 80%. The immunization schedule for pertussis is as follows:

Immunization Schedule for Pertussis

	2 mo.	4 mo.	6 mo.	15 to 18 mo.*	4 to 6 years	11 to 12 years	19 to 64 years
Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis	DTaP**	DTaP	DTaP	DTaP	DTaP	Tdap***	Substitute 1 time dose of Tdap for TD booster; then boost with TD every 10 years

*The 4th dose may be administered as early as age 12 months, provided at least 6 months have elapsed since the third dose.

**Diphtheria and Tetanus toxoids and acellular pertussis vaccine (DTaP). (Minimum age: 6 weeks)

***Tetanus and diphtheria toxoids and acellular pertussis vaccine (Tdap).

The health department urges all adults 19 years and older, who have not previously received a Tdap vaccine, to get a 1-time dose of Tdap in place of the Td booster which is recommended every 10 years. There is no need to wait until the Td booster is due —the dose of Tdap can be given earlier than the 10-year mark since the last Td booster. Receiving Tdap may be especially important during a community outbreak and/or if caring for an infant. It's a good idea for adults to talk to a healthcare provider about what's best for their specific situation.

The health department urges all pregnant women who have not been previously vaccinated with Tdap to get one dose of Tdap during the third trimester or late second trimester – or immediately postpartum, before leaving the hospital or birthing center. By getting Tdap during pregnancy, maternal pertussis antibodies transfer to the newborn, and likely provide protection against pertussis in early life, before the baby starts getting DTaP vaccines. Tdap will also protect the mother at time of delivery, making her less likely to transmit pertussis to her infant.

The Branch-Hillsdale-St. Joseph Community Health Agency offers free vaccinations to qualifying families with children age 18 or younger through the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program. This program is for children who are not insured or whose insurance does not cover immunizations. The department may also be able to assist adults who lack vaccine insurance coverage receive free Tdap booster shots. Immunization clinics are available weekly at our county offices. Please check out our website at www.bhsj.org to learn more about recommended immunizations and to find a clinic location near you. Or call your local office to schedule an appointment:

Branch County Office: 517-279-9561

Hillsdale County Office: 517-437-7395

St. Joseph County Office: 269-273-2161

According to Steve Todd, Health Officer “Vaccination is the best protection. It can protect babies from getting very sick and possibly dying. That’s why we want to make sure everyone is up to date on their pertussis vaccine.”

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