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Health department responds to prevent widespread whooping cough outbreak

ITHACA~ When the Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) identified the presence of whooping cough (Pertussis) within the Alma Public Schools on January 16, 2009, the agency quickly redirected its resources and scheduled a special whooping cough booster vaccination clinic in an effort to stop the spread of illness.

Over four hundred people, ranging from 11 years-of-age to 64 years-of-age, attended the clinic, which was offered free-of-charge and held at the Alma Middle School. While the vast majority of those vaccinated consisted of Alma Public Schools' students and staff, the general public was also welcome to attend and made up roughly 25 percent of those in attendance. Two subsequent clinics were also held on January 27 and February 3 where another thirty-seven people were vaccinated.

"We were very pleased with the turnout," said Dr. Graham. "It was nice to see that so many people took the illness seriously and heeded the health department's warning."

In recent years the health department has focused much effort on enhancing its All-Hazards response, which prepares the agency to deal with a wide variety of emergencies, such as a communicable disease outbreak. Due to this training the health department was able to vaccinate over four hundred people without a hitch.

"This is a great example of one of the many ways public health serves the community," said Health Officer Kimberly Singh. "We responded to a potential threat and stopped it in its tracks."

Whooping cough is a contagious respiratory illness that easily spreads among people in close contact. The illness starts like a cold with a runny nose and sore throat. After 7 – 10 days the cold turns into a cough that gradually worsens and may last up to two months.

People with a persistent cough or those living with a person with a cough are advised to contact their family doctor. "If treated early the duration and severity of symptoms can be reduced," Graham noted.

Parents are urged to make sure children are up-to-date on their vaccinations, including the Tdap (Tetanus, Diphtheria and Pertussis) vaccine. Children who haven't had a complete series of vaccine against whooping cough should be brought up-to-date.

MMDHD would like to thank its community partners that helped make the clinic a success, including Alma Public Schools and Alma Public Safety.

For more information please contact your health care provider or MMDHD at 989-875-3681.

Mid-Michigan District Health Department serves the residents of Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties.

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