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Pertussis (whooping cough) on the rise

ITHACA, STANTON, ST. JOHNS- The Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) has received numerous reports of pertussis (whooping cough) in Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm Counties, and is concerned about the risk to the community, especially since the start of school is fast approaching.

Pertussis is a contagious respiratory illness that starts like a cold with a runny nose and sore throat. After seven to ten days the cold turns into a cough that gradually worsens and lasts six to 12 weeks. Pertussis is most contagious before the onset of the cough.

The incidence of pertussis had declined dramatically with the introduction of the pertussis vaccine. However, outbreaks have grown in number in recent years. Despite vaccination efforts, new cases have increased dramatically since the beginning of this year.

“Whooping cough used to be a disease of infancy,” said Dr. Robert Graham, MMDHD Medical Director. “However, we have seen more and more cases in adolescents and adults recently,” he added.

Infants are most vulnerable and are most likely to contract the illness from older siblings, parents, and care givers. Children under one year of age who contract pertussis are at increased risk of developing secondary pneumonia, being hospitalized and dying of complications. Five percent of people who develop pertussis will develop a secondary case of bacterial pneumonia while twelve percent of children under the age of six months will develop bacterial pneumonia.

People with a persistent cough or people living with a person with a cough should contact their family doctor. “If treated early, the duration and severity of symptoms can be reduced,” Graham noted.

The best way to prevent the disease is through vaccinations. The childhood vaccine is called DTaP while the booster vaccine for adolescents and adults is called Tdap. Infants should receive the DTaP at 2, 4, and 6 months of age. A booster shot should be given between 15 and 18 months of age, and again when the child enters school, at 4 to 6 years of age. Adolescents and adults need the pertussis vaccine booster (Tdap) even if they were completely vaccinated as children. Pre-teens entering 6th grade are also required to receive one dose of Tdap if 5 years have passed since the last dose. If a teenager (13 to 18 years) missed getting the Tdap, ask their doctor about getting it now. Adults who haven’t had a Tdap should get one dose instead of their next Td (tetanus) booster.

-more-

2~ Pertussis

MMDHD also advises:

- See your family doctor if you have a cold that lasts for more than one week
- Stay home from work or school if you are coughing
- If your doctor prescribes antibiotics, take all the medication as directed
- Make sure your children are vaccinated against pertussis
- Stop smoking, drink eight glasses of water a day, get 8 hours of sleep, and take a multiple vitamin
- Wash your hands frequently, carry a waterless hand sanitizer and use it after being in public

For more information, please contact MMDHD at:

Clinton County Branch Office:	989-224-2195
Gratiot County Branch Office:	989-875-3681
Montcalm County Branch Office:	989-831-5237

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

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