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Pertussis Fact Sheet

Starting 2004 reported cases of pertussis (or whooping cough) have increased in Lake County along with several other counties in the state and southeast Wisconsin.

What is Pertussis (Whooping Cough)?

Pertussis is a highly contagious bacterial infection that causes coughing and gagging with little or no fever. An infected person has cough episodes that may end in vomiting or cause a “whoop” sound when the person breathes in. Adults usually have 2 to 3 coughing spells per day children often have 10 or more coughing spells per day.

Potential complications:

- Pertussis is most dangerous to infants less than 1 year old who may develop pneumonia, convulsions, and rarely, brain damage or death.
- Serious complications are less likely in older children and adults.

What does it look like?

- Symptoms appear between 5 to 21 days (average 7-10) after exposure to an infected person.
- Pertussis usually starts with cold symptoms (runny nose, sneezing, mild occasional non productive cough) for several days followed by episodes of severe coughing lasting at least 7 days and can last 1-2 months.
- Paroxysms (coughing fits) may be followed by high pitch whooping noise as the person struggles to inhale air, more common in small children.
- Vomiting or gagging may occur after severe coughing spells,
- Cough is worse at night and often sleep is disturbed.
- **The person will look and feel healthy between coughing episodes.**
- Immunized school children, adolescents and adults have milder symptoms than young children.
- Cough medications do not help.

How is it spread?

- Pertussis is spread through droplets from the mouth and nose when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks.
 - They are most contagious during the early “cold” stage.
 - Older children, adolescents, adults and parent who may be harboring the disease in their nose or throat can spread the infection to infants and young children in the household or by babysitting.
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- Many cases occur in adults and older children because protection from the vaccine lasts only 5 to 10 years after the last dose.

- Persons treated with antibiotics are contagious until the first 5 days of appropriate antibiotic treatment have been completed otherwise they may be contagious up to 21 days since the cough began.

What to do?

- See a physician if you have any of the following
 - A cough lasting more than 7 days
 - Prolonged coughing spells, which may leave you short of breath
 - A cough that gets worse at night and may interfere with sleep
 - Coughing fit ending in gagging or vomiting
 - Develop a cough of any duration after being in close contact with a Pertussis case within the past 3 weeks.
- Persons with suspected pertussis should stay home and avoid contact with others until 5 days of antibiotic treatment have been completed at which time they are no longer contagious.
- Drink plenty of fluids to avoid dehydration (loss of fluids).

Prevention:

- While there is no lifelong protection against pertussis, immunization is the best preventive measure. Pertussis vaccine is given in combination with diphtheria and tetanus (DTaP) in five doses given at 2, 4, 6 months of age, 15-18 months of age and 4-6 years of age.
- If you live or have close contact with someone who has pertussis, you should contact your health care provider who will prescribe an antibiotic to prevent pertussis.
- If the exposure was more than 21 days antibiotics are not needed.
- Monitor for cough illness for up to 21 day following an exposure.
- When coughing cover your mouth or cough into your elbow.
- Wash hands frequently.

Who Else Needs Treatment (Close contacts of the person with Pertussis)

- ALL HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS
- Caregivers/babysitters
- Co-workers who work together in close proximity in a confined space
- Babysitting jobs
- Close friends including boyfriend/girlfriend
- Bus/ car pool seat-mates
- Regular after-school care/ play groups

For additional information you may contact Lake County Health Department Communicable Disease Program at (847) 377-8130 or visit the following educational web sites.

www.whoopingcough.net/symptoms.htm

www.cdc.gov/nip/disease/pertussis/default.htm

www.immunize.org/pertussis/index.htm.

www.pertussis.com