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Winnebago County Reports Increase in Pertussis Cases

Wednesday, May 19, 2010 - The Winnebago County Health Department is reporting a pertussis outbreak (whooping cough). During the first four months of the year, the County averaged one case per month. The month of May has so far seen twenty cases. The age of the affected persons ranges from infant to 64 years, with over half being ages 11 and 12 years old. The cases are spread across all of Winnebago County.

Pertussis is a vaccine preventable disease caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*. Symptoms start with a runny nose, mild fever and mild cough, similar to that of a cold and progress to severe spasms of coughing that can interfere with eating, drinking and breathing. This cough has a characteristic high-pitched “whoop”, which is more common in children. Coughing attacks occur more frequently at night and last for several weeks.

The bacteria is spread through person to person transmission from direct contact with respiratory droplets (i.e. coughing, sneezing, etc) from an infected individual, or by touching the fluid and then touching your eyes, nose, or mouth. In general, a person is at greater risk of getting pertussis if they are within three feet of someone with pertussis for at least 10 minutes, this is considered **close contact**. The period between exposure to the bacteria and onset of illness is usually 7 to 10 days but may be as long as 21 days.

Prevention of secondary infections requires household and other close contacts being treated with the same antibiotic therapeutic intervention. It is important that those individuals with cough illnesses with unknown origin stay away from pregnant women and babies under the ages of 6 months. Children with confirmed pertussis should be excluded from school until completion of five days of antibiotic therapy.

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Although most people recover, complications of pertussis can be severe. Those at greatest risk for complications are the very young, the elderly and those with health issues impacting their immune system.

As a vaccine preventable disease, children should receive the vaccination to prevent infection with pertussis at 2, 4, 6 and 15 months and again between the ages of 4 and 6 years of age. ***The protection from the vaccine does wear off within 5-10 years of vaccination so pre-teens and teenagers are recommended to receive a booster vaccination.*** Adults through age 64 should also boost their decreasing immunity by receiving the combined vaccination for tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (Tdap).

Adolescents 11-12 years of age should receive Tdap instead of Td (tetanus/diphtheria) **before** they start middle school. Adolescents and adults should receive Tdap if they have not received a Td booster within the last 5 years especially if they care for infants less than 12 months of age.

The Winnebago County Health Department is offering free Tdap vaccinations for students 11-18 years of age who have not received a Pertussis-containing vaccine since kindergarten or first grade. Extended hours will be available Monday, May 24th thru Friday, June 4th (except Monday, May 31st) to meet the expected interest due to this current outbreak of Pertussis (Whooping Cough). Please call 815-720-4150 (English) or 815-720-4163 (English/Spanish) for information or to schedule an appointment. For adults 19-64 years of age, Tdap vaccinations are provided by Health Promotion Program for \$50 a shot. Please call for an appointment Monday-Friday at 815-720-4264. This vaccine is also available at your physician's office.

For more information on pertussis please go to the Winnebago County Health Department website at www.wchd.org.

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