



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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State Department of Health Reports Increased Number of Cases of Whooping Cough

JOSEPH E. ROBACH July 18, 2012

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State Health Department Urges People to Get Immunized

ALBANY, N.Y. (July 18, 2012) – State Health Commissioner Nirav R. Shah, M.D., M.P.H., is urging New Yorkers to get vaccinated against pertussis (whooping cough) in light of an elevated number of cases this year in New York and across the country.

"Pertussis is a highly contagious, but very preventable disease" Commissioner Shah said. Here in New York, we are seeing an increased number of reported cases this year, as is the case across the United States. "I encourage New Yorkers to make sure that you and your family members are up-to-date on pertussis vaccinations in order to prevent infection".

Preliminary figures for New York State report 970 cases so far in 2012, as compared to 931 cases in all of 2011. There were 722 total cases reported in 2010, and 265 in 2009. Through June

4, 2012, the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that the number of cases in the U.S. was nearly 44 percent higher than the number reported in the same period the prior year. Additionally, in 2011 three infants died from complications of pertussis in New York.

Pertussis is a bacterial infection of the respiratory tract that can easily spread through the air in droplets when an infected person coughs or sneezes. The disease is cyclical, with the number of cases typically hitting a peak every three-to-five years.

The illness often starts with cold-like symptoms, including sneezing, a runny nose or low-grade fever, along with a mild cough. The cough will become more severe during the first week or two, and is often characterized by episodes of rapid coughs (coughing fit), followed by a high-pitched whoop. The cough may last for a couple of months and is more frequent at night.

Since symptoms experienced by adolescents or adults may be relatively mild, individuals may not realize they have pertussis, yet they can still spread the disease to others, including newborns and children who are not fully immunized.

People contracting pertussis, especially young children, may develop bacterial pneumonia or other complications, such as middle ear infection, loss of appetite, sleep disturbance, temporary loss of consciousness, dehydration, seizures, encephalopathy (a brain disorder), or

apnea. The disease may be fatal in some cases.

The prevalence of pertussis is due, in part, to people being unvaccinated or having an incomplete immunization against the disease. Immunity to the disease decreases five to 10 years after a vaccination and boosters are highly recommended, especially in families with children under the age of one.

A childhood vaccine for pertussis is usually given in conjunction with vaccines for diphtheria and tetanus. The DTaP vaccine should be given to children in a series of five intervals, beginning at two months, then at four months, at six months, between 15 and 18 months, and finally before the child begins school (four to six years old). Under New York State law, any child born after January 1, 2005 is required to have three doses of DTaP (four in NYC) prior to entering a pre-kindergarten program or kindergarten.

Adolescents and adults should receive a single booster vaccination, Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria and acellular pertussis). Because this is a new vaccine, many adults have not received Tdap and they should talk with their provider about getting vaccinated. This is especially important for adults who have contact with infants less than 12 months of age, in order to protect these infants who are at the highest risk of complications or death from pertussis. State law requires that adolescents be immunized with one dose of Tdap prior to enrolling in junior high or high school (grades 6 through 11 for school year 2012-13).

The State Health Department recommends the following steps against pertussis infection:

Follow appropriate vaccination guidelines and consult with a health care provider to ensure immunizations are up-to-date;

Get tested and seek treatment at the first signs of pertussis symptoms, especially if you have young children at home or come in contact with children in other situations (e.g., work, recreational activities);

If possible, avoid close contact with others if you or your child is sick. Stay home , and follow good cough hygiene techniques, including hand washing and covering your mouth when you cough;

Keep infants under the age of one away from anyone who has a cough or other symptoms of pertussis, if possible; and

Be prepared to cooperate with the local health department to help them track the disease and contact friends, schoolmates, and others who may benefit from preventive medicine.

For additional information about pertussis, visit the State Health Department web site at:

http://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/communicable/pertussis/fact_sheet.htm