

News Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Several Cases of Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Under Investigation

(Las Vegas, Nev., - May 19, 2003) – The Clark County Health District is currently investigating several cases of pertussis (whooping cough) occurring among infants and adolescents. Three of the infants were hospitalized.

“Pertussis is a vaccine-preventable disease. However, we have seen a resurgence of cases locally over the past year. This resurgence, coupled with an increase in reported cases in neighboring states, has prompted the health district to remind parents about the importance of childhood immunizations,” said Dr. Donald Kwalick, chief health officer for the health district.

Although the disease may be mild in older children and adults, infants may experience complications such as pneumonia and inflammation of the brain. In rare cases, pertussis can cause death, especially in children less than 1 year of age. Pertussis is highly contagious and spread to others through coughing and sneezing. Adults and older children who have been ill with a prolonged cough should avoid contact with infants and see a physician.

The vaccine for pertussis is given at 2, 4, 6 and 12 months of age, and again at 4 years of age. A minimum of three to four doses are necessary to protect a child from the disease. There is no booster shot for pertussis, and the immunity provided by the vaccine wanes over time. This can contribute to the spread of the disease, if adults and older children who have a mild case of the illness inadvertently expose infants who have not completed the full immunization schedule.

Pertussis is a contagious respiratory disease caused by bacteria. Symptoms of the disease usually occur in stages. The first stage may begin with a runny nose, sneezing, low-grade fever and cough. The cough usually lasts one to two weeks before becoming worse. The second stage of pertussis includes uncontrolled coughing spells followed by a whooping noise when inhaling. During these severe coughing spells, a person may vomit and appear blue in the lips or face from

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lack of oxygen. This stage may last four to six weeks. Importantly, infants may not exhibit all symptoms, including the characteristic whooping cough, but nevertheless may be seriously ill.

Illness can be prevented by avoiding contact with sick individuals. Antibiotics may also be used to prevent pertussis, if prescribed within three weeks of contact with someone who is sick.

For more information about pertussis, call the Clark County Health District Office of Epidemiology at 383-1378. For immunization information, contact the Immunization Clinic at 383-1351.

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