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Pertussis (Whooping Cough) on the Rise in Utah County

Residents Encouraged to Receive or Ensure Pertussis Vaccination

(Provo) -- Utah County Health Department (UCHD) is experiencing an increase of Pertussis cases, many in infants and young children. UCHD anticipates even more cases now that school is back in session. The number of cases at this point in the year is almost double that of the same timeframe in 2017.

Pertussis, or whooping cough is a contagious disease characterized by cold symptoms such as runny nose and an irritating cough. Pertussis can be life-threatening in small children. In previously immunized teenagers and adults it frequently presents as a very persistent and sometimes severe cough that lasts for weeks; it may also present as a very mild cough that may be mistaken as a viral respiratory illness.

Dr. David Flinders, Medical Director for UCHD notes that “Regardless of the cough intensity, pertussis can be spread to others, including unimmunized infants, who are at such high risk, especially those who have not yet been immunized. Since this can be life-threatening in small children, it is very important for those experiencing symptoms to go to their healthcare provider to be diagnosed and receive treatment.”

Vaccination is the best prevention against pertussis. A booster vaccine (Tdap) is available to teenagers and adults. This vaccine is recommended as neither the childhood vaccine nor the illness creates a lifelong immunity to the disease.

“The sooner you are seen a by healthcare provider, the sooner you can be diagnosed and treated,” says Dr. Flinders, “The sooner that diagnosis and treatment begins, the better our chances are of limiting the spread of disease in the community, if it is pertussis, or something else.”

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