



NEWS RELEASE

St. Charles County Government

Department of Governmental Communications

Lisa Dunham, Director
(636) 949-1892

County Health Department Reminds Community of Pertussis Risk

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Nancy Duncan, Director, Division of Public Health 636-949-7407

Julie Burkemper, Public Information Officer - 636-949-7408

St. Charles County — The St. Charles County Department of Community Health and the Environment's Division of Public Health would like to remind the community of the dangers and consequences of pertussis.

Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory disease. It begins with mild upper respiratory symptoms including runny nose and mild cough. A severe chronic cough can develop producing episodes of coughing accompanied by a whooping sound. The cough spasm can be so severe that it causes vomiting. Fever may or may not be present. While pertussis is most often considered a young child's disease, it can occur at any age.

Younger children who have not been immunized have the most severe symptoms. Adults and older children may have the persistent cough but no whoop. Incubation time for this illness, the time from exposure to actual disease, is 7 to 20 days from the date of exposure. Pertussis is treated with antibiotics to help reduce the spread of infection and, if given during the early stage of illness, may help shorten the illness. If left untreated, the severe cough could last one to two months or longer. Pertussis is not usually life-threatening in adults or adolescents. However, it can be extremely serious in younger children and infants.

While a widespread outbreak of pertussis is not expected in the community, the county has had an increasing incidence of the disease. St. Charles County has had 54 reported cases of pertussis so far this year after only 9 reported in 2004. One explanation for the increase in cases may be because of an increased awareness of the disease and better reporting measures.

Children should be kept up-to-date on their immunizations. The vaccine for pertussis is typically given in combination with diphtheria and tetanus and is recommended to be given in several doses between the ages of 2 months and 6 years. Older children and adults may be more at risk of infection since immunity tends to wane with age; therefore it is very important to keep infants and children vaccinated against this easily preventable illness.

Adults and adolescents who have been previously vaccinated can receive a newly licensed booster vaccine. This vaccine is **not** available at the St. Charles County Department of Community Health and the Environment. Check with your physician for availability.

Additional Information about pertussis can be found on the St. Charles County Department of Community Health and the Environment website at www.scchealth.org.