



COUNTY HEALTH MATTERS

CONTACT:

Shawn Kelsch
Warren County Health Department
636-456-7474

Pertussis

May 3, 2004

Pertussis (Whooping Cough) is Still a Threat

In the early to mid 1900s, pertussis (whooping cough) was one of the most common childhood diseases and a major cause of childhood mortality in the United States. Since the introduction of pertussis vaccine in the 1940s the incidence of pertussis has decreased dramatically. However, the disease is still out there and a lot of children and adults are at risk.

Recently there has been an increase in the number of pertussis cases reported in schools and day care centers in Missouri. There have been no reported cases in Warren County, however it is important for parents to be aware and alert.

Pertussis is spread by infected secretions from the nose and throat. Persons with pertussis can be contagious from just before onset of symptoms until up to three weeks after symptoms start. Anyone who has not had pertussis or pertussis vaccine can get the disease. Older children and adults can carry the bacterium and spread it, but may only have mild symptoms.

Symptoms may appear from six to twenty days after exposure, but usually within seven to ten days. Pertussis causes a persistent cough, following a normal cold. The cough occurs in explosive bursts ending in a high-pitched whoop. Occasionally vomiting may follow the cough. Other symptoms are low fever and runny nose. The child may seem well in between coughing fits.

Pertussis can be a very serious illness in children under one year of age. Complications can range from ear infections to pneumonia and even death.

If you or your child develops an illness with a cough contact your physician. Also, please check your children's immunization records to ensure that they are properly immunized. If you are not sure how to read the immunization records stop by our office. We will be happy to assist you and make an appointment for your child if needed. For more information on pertussis or any other public health concern you may call the health department at 636-456-7474.