

PRESS RELEASE



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PERTUSSIS ON THE RISE IN NIAGARA COUNTY

The Niagara County Department of Health would like to inform the community that several cases of Pertussis (Whooping Cough) have recently been identified in Niagara County. Since January 2012, fifteen cases have been medically diagnosed based on laboratory tests and/or signs and symptoms, compared to eleven cases for the entire year in 2011. Affected individuals range in age from sixty-five years to two months, with a predominance of cases in school-age children. None were hospitalized, and are currently receiving antibiotic therapy at home.

Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by bacteria. Pertussis bacteria can be found in the mouth, nose, and throat of an infected person. It can be spread to other people by direct contact with discharges from the nose and throat and through aerosolized droplets spread by coughing and sneezing. Onset of signs and symptoms usually occurs five to ten days after exposure, but may occur up to twenty one days later. Pertussis begins with mild cold signs and symptoms and may include runny nose, low-grade fever, and mild cough which increase in severity and duration over the next seven to fourteen days. A person is highly infectious during this phase of illness. The cough is characterized by episodes of intense, rapid, uncontrollable coughing followed by gagging, vomiting, and exhaustion. A crowing sound or high pitched whoop often occurs as the person makes a long and forceful effort to breathe air in after a severe coughing attack.

Infants and very young children may have periods of apnea. (Apnea is the term used to describe when breathing stops for fifteen seconds or more), and cyanosis (turning blue). Very young infants under six months of age may have bursts of severe coughing but may not be strong enough to have the typical whoop. Very young children and infants may appear lethargic and feed poorly and have difficulty breathing.

Antibiotic treatment is recommended to shorten the contagious period by killing the bacteria in the nose and throat so other people are not exposed to infection. However, the cough may persist for several months, even after treatment with antibiotics.

Pertussis is a vaccine-preventable disease. The most effective means to control Pertussis is vaccination. Pertussis is generally given in combination with diphtheria and tetanus (DTaP) in a series of five doses administered at two, four, six, and fifteen to eighteen months and prior to school entrance at age four or five years of age. The duration of protective immunity is five to ten years.

As of October 2005, the United States has joined Canada in providing Pertussis containing vaccine (Tdap) for adolescents and adults. Adolescents, eleven through eighteen years of age should get one booster dose of Tdap. Adults nineteen through sixty four years of age who need a tetanus booster can receive one dose of Tdap. Td should be used for later doses.

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Others who should receive a dose of Tdap are:

- Adults who expect to have close contact with an infant younger than twelve months of age.
- Healthcare workers who have direct patient contact in hospitals, healthcare facilities or clinics.
- Women who are planning to become pregnant (vaccinate one month prior), or if unvaccinated and already pregnant, immediately after giving birth.

The Niagara County Department of Health offers the following recommendations:

1. Keep young infants away from **anyone** with a runny nose, cough, fever, sinus infection, and signs of a cold or pinkeye.
2. Always use thorough hand washing prior to infant contact.
3. Never put your fingers into an infant's mouth.
4. Make sure siblings of a new infant are fully vaccinated against Pertussis.
5. An infant with a cough illness should be promptly and carefully evaluated by a pediatrician.
6. Teach your children proper disposal of used tissues and good hand washing.
7. Consider calling your doctor if cold signs and symptoms with cough last more than one week.
8. Vaccinate your infants and children on schedule.
9. Adolescents and eligible adults should receive Tdap.

To schedule vaccinations call the Niagara County Department of Health Immunization Program at **278-1903**.

To report Pertussis (Laboratories, medical professionals) call the Communicable Disease Control Program at **278-8598**.

For general information call Nurse Telehealth. A Registered Nurse will take your call at **278-1900**.