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DPHHS HAN ADVISORY

Distributed via the DPHHS Health Alert Network (HAN) System

Friday, March 14, 2008 5:30 PM

Subject: Increased Pertussis Activity

Recommended Actions:

1. Be on the alert for cases of pertussis in your communities. Anyone with a cough of >14 days duration, an inspiratory whoop and/or post-cough vomiting or breathlessness should be tested for pertussis. *Test only symptomatic persons.*
2. Ensure appropriate treatment of cases and prophylaxis for close contacts.
3. Forward this message to health care providers as you see fit in your jurisdiction.

The total number of statewide pertussis cases has climbed to 26 so far in 2008, compared to just eight cases reported at this time in 2007. Cases have been reported in Cascade (2), Flathead (6), Lake (16), Missoula (1), Ravalli (1), and Yellowstone (2) Counties.

Background

- Ten to 30 cases of pertussis are reported each year in Montana.
- Pertussis can occur at any age; however, increasing numbers of cases are being seen in the 10-19 year age group.
- Pertussis usually begins as a mild upper respiratory infection, resembling a common cold. Within two weeks, the cough becomes more severe and is characterized by episodes of numerous rapid coughs followed by a crowing or high pitched whoop. A thick, clear mucus may be discharged by coughing. These episodes may continue or recur for one to two months, and are more frequent at night.
- The incubation period is usually five to ten days but may be as long as 21 days.
- A person can transmit pertussis from seven days following exposure to three weeks after the onset of coughing episodes. The period of communicability is reduced to between five and seven days when antibiotic therapy is begun.
- Immunity following primary pertussis vaccination is not permanent and not 100% protective. A single booster dose of Tdap is recommended for those aged 11 – 64.

For further Information: CDC Guidelines for the Control of Pertussis Outbreaks
(<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pertussis-guide/guide.htm>)

DPHHS Contact: Bonnie Barnard, 444-0273



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(15 KB)

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The goal of Montana's Health Alert Network is to transmit information to local public health authorities as quickly as possible, and assign a suitable priority to the message that is sensitive to the impact of a health-related event providing information relative to the public health and safety of Montanans. For questions or comments relative to Montana's HAN system you may contact the DPHHS HAN Coordinator, Gerry Wheat at <<mailto:gwheat@mt.gov>>

Categories of Health Alert messages:

- Health Alert:** conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.
- Health Advisory:** provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.
- Health Update:** provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.

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NEWS FROM THE MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

For immediate release

March 14, 2008

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Pertussis Cases on the Rise in Montana

The total number of statewide pertussis cases has climbed to 26, state health officials said Friday, March 14, 2008.

That figure compares to just eight cases reported at this same time in 2007.

This year's fast start does concern Bonnie Barnard of the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) because she knows all too well how quickly pertussis, or whooping cough, can spread if the proper precautions aren't taken.

The bacteria has specifically shown up in western Montana and state and local health officials are collaborating to ward off a serious outbreak. "We're really trying to stay ahead of this," said Barnard, the Communicable Disease Surveillance Coordinator for DPHHS.

This year, cases have been reported in Cascade, Flathead, Lake, Missoula, Ravalli, and Yellowstone Counties. The county with the most cases is Lake County with 16, followed by Flathead with six cases.

Brigid O'Connor of the Lake County Health Department has been working closely with healthcare providers in Lake County over the last few of weeks to identify cases early and make sure that contacts receive the appropriate prophylactic treatment.

Cooperation among clinicians in the affected areas has helped the situation immensely, Barnard said. "Timely reporting of cases and thorough identification of contacts of the cases is essential to successful public health disease control," she added.

Barnard offers these simple suggestions to help diminish the spread of pertussis:

- Anyone who has a cough for more than 14 days with post-cough vomiting or a 'whoop' noise should be evaluated by a health care provider for pertussis.
- Early recognition of the signs and symptoms of pertussis is important. (see below)
- And, recognize if you've been in close contact with someone who has been diagnosed with pertussis, seek preventive antibiotics from a healthcare provider.
- Keep up-to-date on vaccinations.

Also, keep in mind 15-20 percent of people who have been vaccinated are still not immune. And, Barnard said there is a misconception that people who have been vaccinated but still get pertussis are not contagious. “That simply isn’t true,” she said.

Pertussis can be a very serious disease, particularly for infants less than one year of age. Since it is quite contagious, the disease can easily spread through the air from a sick person during talking, sneezing or coughing.

The illness starts with symptoms similar to a common cold. People suffering from whooping cough often develop coughing fits, especially at night, which may give a high-pitched ‘whoop’ sound. The ‘whoop’ is a sign that the person is struggling to breathe between coughs. The disease can be very severe and, although deaths are rare, they do occur, especially in infants less than one year of age.

For more information call Barnard at 406-444-0273.