

Whooping Cough still with us, still dangerous Adults are urged to get vaccinated.

What is pertussis?

Pertussis, more commonly known as whooping cough, is a highly contagious disease that begins like a cold. Individuals with pertussis usually have a runny nose and cough. As time passes, the cough gets worse and can last up to six weeks or more. Pertussis is known for uncontrollable, violent coughing which makes it hard to breathe. After fits of many coughs, someone with pertussis needs to take deep breaths, which often results in a “whooping” sound. Most teens and adults do not have the characteristic “whoop” after coughing, so pertussis may be mistaken for a common cold, but they are still highly contagious. Adults, who don’t realize they are carrying the disease, unknowingly pass it on to infants, family members and close friends.

Why should I be concerned about pertussis?

Pertussis is a major health concern. The number of pertussis cases in Polk County, Iowa was 10 times higher in 2012 than in 2011. While most adults and teens recover from pertussis after several weeks of severe coughing, it can be deadly to infants. Pertussis keeps infants from breathing and eating, and may cause pneumonia, seizures, brain damage and even death. In infants, the early symptoms of pertussis may seem like a common cold. Often parents don’t realize their infant has pertussis until the baby is extremely sick. For some infants, the cough can be minimal, but they may have a symptom known as “apnea”, which is a pause in the child’s breathing. When infants do have a cough, pertussis can cause violent and rapid coughing spells, which can cause a baby to throw up. In infants, coughing fits can go on for up to 10 weeks and recovery can happen slowly. Of infants younger than one year who get pertussis, about half are hospitalized. The younger the infant, the more likely treatment in the hospital will be needed.

How does pertussis spread?

Pertussis is one of the most contagious diseases in the world. The disease spreads through the air when people cough, talk, or sneeze while in close contact with others, who then breathe in the pertussis bacteria. Pertussis is most commonly spread by family members. Up to 90% of people living with someone with pertussis get the disease. Over 80% of babies who get pertussis get it from a family member, usually a parent, grandparent or sibling who has the disease but do not know they have it.

Why get vaccinated for pertussis?

Pertussis is a disease that can be prevented by vaccination. The best way to prevent pertussis is to get vaccinated with either Tdap (for older children and adults) or DTaP (for infants and children under 7 years) vaccines. Children should get five doses of DTaP during well child exams with one dose at 2, 4, and 6 months, 15-18 months and 4-6 years. Infants are not fully protected from pertussis until at least two weeks after their third dose at 6 months of age. Tdap is the booster shot for teens (11-18 years of age) and adults (19 years and older) that protects against pertussis, along with tetanus and diphtheria. Expectant mothers should receive

the Tdap vaccine during each pregnancy, either at 27-36 weeks or directly after birth. While no vaccine is 100% effective, it will greatly reduce the chances of catching pertussis and will reduce the severity of symptoms if a person does get pertussis. Since babies are not fully protected until after 6 months of age, everyone around a baby should be vaccinated in order to protect the baby, a strategy called cocooning.

Where can I get a pertussis vaccination?

Tdap vaccinations will be available at no cost at the following community clinics to people over age 11:

- ELIM Christian Fellowship Church, 525 East 9th Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50309
Sunday, May 19, 2013 after 8:00 & 10:30 AM Services.

- The Polk County Health Department's booth at Juneteenth at Evelyn Davis Park
Saturday, June 15, 2013

Tdap vaccinations are also available at your health care provider. Vaccinations are available at the Polk County Health Department to people of all ages. Some may qualify for free vaccinations. Bring your insurance card and immunization records. Call for an appointment Mon-Fri from 8-5 and until 7:00 on Tuesdays, 286-3798.