



Pat Quinn, Governor
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M E M O R A N D U M

TO: Dr. Christopher A. Koch
State Superintendent of Education

FROM: Damon T. Arnold, M.D., M.P.H. *Damon T. Arnold, M.D., MPH*
Director, Public Health

DATE: September 2, 2010

RE: Health Alert for Pertussis

Over 445 cases of pertussis have been reported in Illinois to date, with 65 percent of those reported since May 2010. Of the cases reported since May 2010, 45 percent have occurred among school-aged children; over 30 percent have occurred in children under five years of age.

Pertussis is a highly infectious illness that is easily transmitted through coughing and sneezing and may persist among a population for weeks to months. Symptoms of pertussis usually occur 5 to 10 days after exposure, but can take up to 21 days to appear. Initially symptoms are similar to a common cold: a runny nose, low-grade fever and a mild occasional cough. However, the cough can become severe and spasmodic - with a distinctive “whooping” sound - and can progress to vomiting between bouts of coughing.

Patients with pertussis must be isolated from day care, school, work, and public gatherings for at least 5 days after the start of appropriate antibiotic therapy to limit further transmission. Although most people recover completely from pertussis, complications from the disease can be severe in high risk groups, especially infants under one year, and children who have not been fully immunized against the disease.

Most children are immunized against pertussis disease by receiving a series of vaccine doses as DTaP vaccine. However, immunity wanes as they reach adolescence. Since 2005, there has been an adolescent/adult pertussis booster vaccine (Tdap) that can be used for prevention and control of pertussis. Tdap vaccine is recommended to be routinely given at ages 11-12 years.

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In addition, the Illinois Department of Public Health recommends that all close contacts to a person with pertussis disease receive antibiotic treatment even if they have been vaccinated recently against pertussis. Close contacts include household members and persons who have had direct contact with respiratory, oral, and/or nasal secretions from a person with pertussis or have been within 3 feet of that person for at least 10 minutes.

We expect that many schools will experience pertussis cases during the 2010-2011 school year. IDPH encourages schools to continue to report to their local health department any students or staff known or suspected of having pertussis so local health department staff can assist school administration by implementing control measures to reduce the further spread of pertussis within the school environment.

Thank you, in advance, for your cooperation and support.