

December 8, 2011

Dear Child Care Provider:

Vermont is currently seeing an increase in cases of pertussis (whooping cough). The Vermont Department of Health has confirmed 47 cases so far in 2011. Cases have occurred in infants, children and adults. While most cases have been confirmed in Chittenden County, people throughout the state should be aware about this disease.

Pertussis is a contagious disease that is spread person-to-person by close contact (within 3 feet) when infected people cough. While immunization against pertussis remains the best protection against developing this illness, pertussis can occur in fully immunized individuals.

Pertussis begins with cold symptoms and an irritating cough, which usually becomes increasingly severe over 1-2 weeks. Symptoms often include a long series of coughs, sometimes followed by a whooping noise. However, older children, adults and very young infants often don't develop the whoop. Vomiting may occur after a coughing episode. There is generally no fever.

Antibiotic treatment early in the disease may decrease the severity of symptoms and reduce the infectiousness of the ill person. Antibiotics are also recommended for close contacts of pertussis cases in order to prevent them from contracting and/or transmitting the disease.

The Vermont Department of Health recommends the following:

1. Any child or staff person in your facility that has any of the above symptoms or a cough lasting more than a week should be evaluated by a health care provider.
2. Children or staff with confirmed or suspected pertussis should be excluded from school until they have completed 5 days of the antibiotic treatment for pertussis.
3. All children should be up to date on their immunizations. The Vermont Department of Health recommends that all individuals over 10 years of age receive a single (booster) dose of Tdap vaccine. It's important that adults who have close contact with infants receive Tdap vaccine. Please consult your child's/your health care provider.
4. Close contacts, including household members or close friends of persons diagnosed with pertussis should receive a protective course of antibiotics to prevent additional infections. In child care settings, protective antibiotics may be recommended for the group with close contact to the ill person. When a case is reported, a Public Health Nurse will investigate to identify close contacts and refer them to their health care providers.
5. Children less than 1 year old, particularly infants under 6 months of age, are most likely to experience severe illness if they develop pertussis. Infants and children often get pertussis from adults who are coughing and don't realize they have pertussis. When possible, young

infants should be kept away from people with a cough. **Babies with any coughing illness or choking episodes should be promptly evaluated by their physician.**

Please notify the Health Department if anyone in your child care facility is diagnosed with confirmed or possible pertussis. If you have any questions, please call the Vermont Department of Health at (802) 863-7240 or call your local District Health office.