



## **Pertussis (*Whooping Cough*)**

### **January 2016**

### **Lane County Public Health**

Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by bacteria:

- It begins with a runny nose, sneezing, low-grade fever and mild cough. The cough gradually becomes more severe.
- After a week or two, the second stage of the illness begins, characterized by coughing spasms ending with a gasp or whoop as the patient tries to get air.
- Sometimes the coughing fits are so severe, they result in vomiting. This stage of the illness may persist for up to two to three months.
- Pertussis is particularly dangerous, even fatal, for infants who are too young to be fully immunized.

Before the vaccine became available in the 1940s, pertussis was a common childhood disease with more than 200,000 cases in the US each year. Since widespread vaccination, pertussis has decreased more than 80 percent. Despite the fact that the vaccine is a required immunization in Oregon schools, the disease is making a comeback. In 2010-11, California had a pertussis outbreak with over 9,000 cases; 10 infants died and they continue to have an ongoing pertussis outbreak (i.e., 2015-2016). Washington State had a massive pertussis outbreak in 2013 and is seeing an increase in cases in 2015-2016. Given the experiences of our neighboring states, it appears the potential for a large pertussis outbreak in Oregon is real and current.

#### **Current Situation:**

- Lane County has confirmed 56 cases of pertussis in 2015; another 5 cases are presumptive
- Nine of the 56 cases were infants, five of whom were hospitalized
- One case of pertussis was confirmed in the first week of 2016

LCPH believes pertussis is greatly underreported in adults because they don't often whoop, almost never are hospitalized for it and this infection has traditionally been thought of as a disease of children even though adults regularly transmit pertussis to vulnerable infants. Research has shown that at least 50% of infants with pertussis were infected by close family members (e.g., mother, father, grandparent, etc.).

#### **Vaccine Recommendations:**

LCPH urges County residents, especially those living or working with newborns, to get a pertussis booster. Further CDC recommendations are as follows:

- Pertussis immunity from vaccination may wane over time, so it's important that new parents and caregivers get another pertussis vaccination to protect their infants from whooping cough. It is also important for health care providers to make sure they are up-to-date on their pertussis immunizations.
- Pregnant women should get a dose of Tdap during each pregnancy, preferably at 27 through 36 weeks gestation.
- The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends Tdap vaccination for adults ages 65 and older.

**For information on obtaining a pertussis vaccination, call your health care provider.  
For additional information contact LCPH Communicable Disease Program at 541-682-4041.**