Re: Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Notification - Colorado State University Student

A student at Colorado State University and living in Braiden Hall has been diagnosed with pertussis (also known as whooping cough) confirmed through laboratory testing and may have been infectious and able to pass the infection on to other individuals. The ill student is being treated with antibiotics to stop further spread of the infection and will remain out of school until 5 days of antibiotic treatment has been completed.

The state of Colorado and Larimer County has been experiencing an outbreak of Pertussis cases since 2012. Pertussis is a bacterial illness involving the respiratory tract that begins with cold-like symptoms and progresses to a severe cough. Some cases can have severe coughing spells which may cause vomiting, breathlessness, a change in facial color, and a whooping sound that follows the coughing fits. (Whooping is less common after infancy.) The illness can last from six to ten weeks. Disease symptoms vary with age and vaccination status, with milder illness generally seen among fully vaccinated persons.

Pertussis is spread through sneezing and coughing and contact with droplets from the respiratory tract of the person who is infected. It usually takes from 7-10 days for symptoms to appear after exposure to pertussis, but symptoms could appear from 4 to 21 days after exposure.

Our primary goal is to prevent pertussis in infants and very young children and anyone with a medical condition that would be complicated because of pertussis. Pertussis can be particularly severe in infants under 12 months of age and in persons with any chronic respiratory disease such as asthma.

A vaccine (Tdap) for adolescents and adults is available through health care providers, the CSU Health Network, or your local health department. The vaccine provides protection against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis.

What to Do

- If you have a respiratory infection with a cough now or develop pertussis-like symptoms, do not expose others to the cough. Consult with your health care provider and inform him/her that there may have been an exposure to pertussis so that appropriate testing and treatment can be considered. Consult with your health care provider, the CSU Health Network, or your local health department to ensure immunizations (Tdap) are up to date. Vaccine is available from most private physicians, CSU Health Network, or your County Health Department.

- Household members and those with close face-to-face contact with a known pertussis case can be treated preventively with appropriate antibiotics to stop further spread of the infection. Antibiotics can prevent the development of the illness or make it less severe.

- Pertussis cases should stay home from school, or work until they have taken a prescribed antibiotic for 5 days.

- If you have questions about Pertussis, call your health care provider, Beverly Earley at 491-1778, Jeannine Reiss at 491-6121, or the Larimer County Department of Health and Environment at 970-498-6700.

- Please call the CSU Health Network Immunizations clinic (491-1778) or your health care provider to inquire about clinic appointments and vaccination options.
PERTUSSIS (WHOOPING COUGH) FACTS

WHAT IS PERTUSSIS?

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a contagious illness that is spread when an infected person sneezes or coughs and another individual breathes in the bacteria.

WHO GETS PERTUSSIS?

Pertussis can occur at any age. It may be very severe in infants and young children (especially those who have not had 3 doses of pertussis vaccine), resulting in hospitalization, seizures, long-term neurological problems, and even death. Pertussis can occur in immunized individuals, because the immunity gained from vaccination typically wanes over time. Although widespread use of pertussis vaccines has reduced the number of pertussis cases, this disease has been increasing in recent years.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF PERTUSSIS?

Symptoms usually appear between 7 to 10 days after exposure to the bacteria, but can develop 4 to 21 days after exposure. The disease starts with cold-type symptoms: low-grade fever, runny nose and mild cough. Within two weeks, the cough becomes more severe and is characterized by episodes of fits of coughing. Vomiting, breathlessness, a change in facial color, and/or whooping sound may follow the coughing fits. In between coughing fits, the individual may look and feel fine. These coughing fits may continue for several months, and are more frequent at night.

HOW IS PERTUSSIS SPREAD?

Pertussis is spread through droplets when an infected person coughs, sneezes or talks. The first symptoms usually appear 7 to 10 days after exposure. The greatest risk of spread is during the early stages of the illness through the first three weeks of coughing. Those treated with antibiotics are considered contagious until they have completed 5 days of an appropriate antibiotic.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT FOR PERTUSSIS?

A health care provider may prescribe an appropriate antibiotic such as azithromycin (Zithromax), clarithromycin, or erythromycin. These antibiotics will reduce the contagious period, but will not reduce the cough symptoms unless taken in the very early stage of the infection.

IS THERE A VACCINE FOR PERTUSSIS? WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF PERTUSSIS?

The vaccine for pertussis is given in combination with diphtheria and tetanus. Two new pertussis vaccines (Tdap) were licensed in the summer of 2005 for use in adolescents and adults. Immunization authorities recommend that five doses of DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis) vaccine be given at two, four, six, 15 to 18 months of age, and between four and six years of age and a single dose of Tdap be administered at 11-18 years of age.

The most effective measure is to maintain the highest level of immunization in the community. If students are not up to date with their pertussis shots they should receive Tdap vaccine as soon as possible. Persons with pertussis should avoid contact with others until they have taken 5 full days of an appropriate antibiotic. Close contacts of a case of pertussis should receive a course of an appropriate antibiotic to prevent pertussis.

For additional information, contact CSU Health Network at 491-1778.