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News Release

*For Immediate Release*

## **Whooping Cough Cases Rise in Greene County**

The health department is seeing a rise in cases of pertussis, or whooping cough. While the number of cases is not especially large, any such spike is notable because of the highly contagious nature of the disease. The situation is compounded by an alarming lack of immunizations among infants in these recent cases.

The department has confirmed four cases in recent weeks. Three of the four cases were infants under a year old. The fourth was an adult.

Pertussis is a highly contagious, bacterial disease marked by severe, uncontrollable coughing that makes it difficult to breathe. A coughing fit is often followed by a deep inhalation that has a distinctive "whoop" sound. Infants and young children are at the highest risk of life-threatening consequences. More than half of infants younger than 1 year of age who get the disease must be hospitalized. Of those infants who are hospitalized for pertussis, about one in five will get pneumonia and about one in 100 will die, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Pertussis is spread through airborne droplets and respiratory secretions to those in close contact with the case, like household members. Symptoms begin with cold or flu-like symptoms that progress into severe coughing that can last for months. The incubation period for pertussis is six to 21 days.

Pertussis can be treated with an antibiotic. In addition, those with close contact to a case should be given an antibiotic to prevent disease  $\zeta$  even if they are not exhibiting symptoms. This is because of the long incubation period and the potential severity of symptoms.

The best prevention is vaccination. Children should receive five doses: at 2, 4, 6 and 15-18 months, and at 4-6 years of age. Pre-teens, teens and adults should receive a booster of TDAP (tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis). Those adults who are in close contact with infants are strongly encouraged to do so. Contact your healthcare provider to find out about vaccine availability. Shots are also available at the health department's Westside Public Health Center. Call (417) 874-1220 for more information.

Choosing not to immunize children puts not only your child at risk, but anyone the child comes into contact with at home, school, daycare, a doctor's office or elsewhere. The risk is real. Cases of vaccine-preventable diseases are on the rise nationally, with outbreaks of pertussis in California, Ohio and Michigan in recent years, according to the CDC. California saw a high of 9,000 cases in 2010  $\zeta$  the highest number in 63 years  $\zeta$  with 10 infant deaths from the disease. A focus on awareness and a stronger push for vaccinations helped bring that number down to 3,000

cases in 2011 with zero deaths. Still, those numbers are considered high for a disease that is largely preventable by immunization.

In 2009 the state of Missouri saw an 80.9 percent increase in pertussis cases compared to the 5-year median, and southwest Missouri saw a 200 percent increase above the 5-year median.

"The growing trend of parents choosing not to get their children vaccinated is very troubling," said Kevin Gipson, Director of Health.

A video from the Mayo Clinic gives some further background on pertussis, including what the distinctive "whooping" sounds like: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=15SHtdczSBc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=15SHtdczSBc)

For more information, contact: Mike Brothers, Public Information Administrator, (417) 874-1205.