THE STATE of ALASKA
GOVERNOR SEAN PARNELL

Department of Health and Social Services

DIVISION OF PUBLIC HEALTH
Section of Epidemiology

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To Directors of Camps, Sports Teams, and other Organized Youth Activities:

From June through August, 2012, Alaska had higher levels of pertussis than expected. Washington State had epidemic levels of pertussis starting in December 2011. The State of Alaska Section of Epidemiology is preparing for increasing levels of pertussis in our state. The primary goal of public health in response to the pertussis cases is to prevent infection in infants and pregnant women, who are at highest risk for complications related to pertussis.

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a highly contagious disease caused by a bacteria found in the mouth, nose and throat of an infected person. Pertussis begins with cold-like symptoms and a cough that gradually becomes worse. Within two weeks, the cough becomes more severe and is characterized by episodes of numerous rapid coughs sometimes followed by a crowing or high-pitched whoop, or vomiting. **Pertussis can be a very serious disease, especially for infants less than one year old. Immunization against pertussis is the best way to protect infants and help prevent outbreaks in your community.**

Pertussis is spread person to person through respiratory droplets typically produced when a person with pertussis coughs or sneezes. Persons with symptoms of pertussis should be careful to limit exposure to others from respiratory secretions, and consult their primary provider. Adults working with infants should be especially careful to avoid spreading pertussis to infants.

Public Health Recommendations:

- Encourage all staff and children to be up to date on their immunizations.
    - If adults have not had a pertussis vaccine as an adult, a booster vaccine is recommended to help reduce illness from pertussis in the community and help prevent serious disease in newborns that may be exposed to pertussis. **It is recommended that adults receive one booster of Tdap vaccine.**
    - Any child less than 7 years of age who is not up to date on pertussis immunizations should obtain a dose of DTaP vaccine as soon as possible. **The most effective way to prevent pertussis is to be up-to-date with pertussis immunization.**

- Recommend all staff and children who develops symptoms of pertussis (prolonged cough which may include vomiting) to contact their health care provider.
- Exclude staff and children diagnosed with pertussis from attendance until
    - 5 days of antibiotic treatment have been completed, or
    - 21 days have passed since the cough started, or the cough has completely resolved
- For persons who are well and have had **close contact*** with someone diagnosed with pertussis, the following recommendations apply:

Close contacts that should receive pertussis prophylaxis (antibiotics)

- Infants (<1 year of age);
- Pregnant women in the 3rd trimester, since they will soon have contact with an infant;
- ALL household contacts of a case ***IF*** there is an infant or a pregnant woman in the 3rd trimester in the same household;
- ALL close contacts who attend/work in a childcare setting in which a case of pertussis was diagnosed ***IF*** there is an infant or a pregnant woman (3rd trimester) in the setting, or;
- Prophylaxis of other contacts at the discretion of the primary care provider

***Close contact** includes direct face-to-face contact, or contact with respiratory, oral or nasal secretions of a symptomatic person who is diagnosed with pertussis.

Adults in Alaska who are uninsured or underinsured can contact the local Public Health Center for immunizations. Persons with health insurance should contact their primary providers for health care and immunizations.

For more information about pertussis, please visit the State of Alaska Section of Epidemiology website http://www.epi.alaska.gov/id/dod/pertussis/pertussis.htm or http://www.epi.alaska.gov/id/default.stm and click on the link for Pertussis. If you have additional questions, please contact the State of Alaska Section of Epidemiology at 907-269-8000.

Sincerely,

Michael Cooper, MD, MS
Infectious Disease Program Manager