



# NEWS RELEASE

LINCOLN-LANCASTER COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** November 12, 2008  
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## **Pertussis (Whooping Cough) Cases Increasing in Lancaster County**

The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department has investigated 13 cases of pertussis (“Whooping Cough”) since January of this year. Two of the cases were in infants under six months of age. Infants do not typically begin the four dose series of immunizations against pertussis until two months of age. Children who are younger than seven years of age should have received at least four doses of pertussis vaccine (DTaP vaccine). Parents are strongly encouraged to be sure their children are current on all immunizations and that every effort is made to begin and continue infant immunizations on time. For those who received the pertussis immunization as a young child, it is important to understand that protection against pertussis is not life-long, that protection decreases 5 to 10 years after that last dose of vaccine.

Pertussis vaccine is now available for adults and children ages 11 through 64 years of age. Called Tdap, the vaccine is routinely recommended as a one time booster for children 11-12 years of age. It is also recommended as one time booster for adults. Parents who are unsure of their child’s immunization status should contact their health care provider or the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department at 441-8065.

Bruce Dart, Health Director, urged parents with infants to avoid taking them to places that have large crowds of people and to avoid having them in close contact with individuals who have a persistent cough. Those at greatest risk for developing pertussis-associated complications are young infants.

Pertussis, also known as “Whooping Cough,” is a bacterial infection of the respiratory tract. It causes violent spells of coughing that may be followed by difficulty in breathing, vomiting, or “whooping” (a rapid in-drawing of air). Coughing due to pertussis usually lasts more than two weeks and sometimes up to two months and can be complicated by pneumonia, seizures, encephalopathy or death. Pertussis is highly contagious during the first 2-3 weeks of coughing. It is spread by airborne droplets of the bacteria that are coughed or sneezed into the air by the infected person. Adults, teens and vaccinated children who become infected with whooping cough may have mild symptoms. Antibiotics are used to treat both the infected individual and all household contacts, regardless of their immunization status. Contacts outside the home that are symptomatic should be evaluated by their healthcare provider.

Parents of infants with an unexplained persistent runny nose, sneezing, fever and a dry, irritating cough lasting more than a few days should contact their healthcare provider. Any individual who develops episodes of short, rapid coughs followed by a quick, deep breath (“whoop”) should contact their healthcare provider.