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For Immediate Release

To: Local Media

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PERTUSSIS IN THE U.P.

Pertussis (whooping cough) is now circulating in several of our U.P. communities and public health is asking that all U.P. adults check their immunization status and that of their children. This is particularly important before kids head back to school where it is even easier for pertussis to circulate. There have been 10 cases in the past month or so and 80% of the cases have been in children. Cases have occurred in the Dickinson-Iron, Delta-Menominee and Marquette County Health Department districts. Most medical providers and all health departments have vaccine on hand.

Health Department Medical Director, Teresa Frankovich, M.D. notes that children normally receive the DTaP vaccine, which provides protection against pertussis, at 2, 4, 6 and 12-15 months of age, and a booster dose at 4-6 years of age. “Some parents may not realize that another booster dose (called Tdap), is now required for children at 11 years of age. This one-time booster is also recommended for adults who have not had a pertussis vaccine since childhood and is recommended for pregnant women with *each* pregnancy.” Frankovich said. “Because young infants are at highest risk for serious disease with pertussis, it is particularly important that expectant or new parents be vaccinated as well as grandparents and others who have close contact with young children.” The vaccine does not prevent all cases of pertussis but it is the best strategy to prevent infection and decrease disease in our community. It can also help to lessen the severity of disease in those who do become infected.

Pertussis usually begins with mild upper respiratory symptoms, such as runny nose and mild cough, with little or no fever. It then progresses to a more severe cough, with spasms of coughing which may cause vomiting. Some, but not all individuals will actually make a whooping sound as they take a breath between coughing spasms. This is how pertussis came to be called “whooping cough.” Antibiotics are

used to treat the infection and decrease contagiousness in people with pertussis and are also used to help prevent infection in close contacts.

Most older children and adults who get pertussis will cough for many weeks and some may develop complications such as rib fractures or pneumonia. As noted by the Centers for Disease Control, “About half of babies who get whooping cough will end up in the hospital. The younger the baby is when infected with pertussis, the more likely it is that doctors will need to treat the baby in the hospital. Of those babies who get treatment for whooping cough in a hospital, about 1 out of 4 will get pneumonia and 1 or 2 out of 100 will die... Each year, about 20 infants die from whooping cough in the United States.”

Unfortunately, it can be up to three weeks between the time someone is infected with pertussis and the time they actually develop symptoms, so when one new case is identified in the community, additional cases are likely to emerge over the subsequent weeks. Individuals with symptoms of pertussis are generally most contagious in the first two weeks of illness.

Dr. Frankovich reminds parents, “The best way to protect your family is to make sure that everyone in the household is up-to-date on their pertussis vaccinations. It is also important to have your child seen by a healthcare provider, if he is sick with pertussis-like symptoms, before sending him to school or having him participating in group activities outside the home.” Individuals should call their healthcare provider or the health department, to see if they or their children are due for a pertussis vaccine or to make an appointment to be vaccinated. Vaccinating your family not only protects your loved ones, it protects those at highest risk from serious disease throughout our communities.

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