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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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PERTUSSIS OUTBREAK IN OCEAN COUNTY

Reported cases of pertussis, or whooping cough, vary from year to year and tend to peak every 3-5 years. Ocean County is currently experiencing an outbreak of pertussis, predominantly in the northern part of the county at the present time. Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by *Bordetella pertussis*. It is important to remember that while pertussis is most often considered a young child's disease, it can occur at any age and can cause serious illness.

The disease starts like the common cold, with runny nose or congestion, sneezing, and maybe mild cough or fever. After 1–2 weeks, severe coughing can begin. Unlike the common cold, pertussis can become a series of coughing fits that continues for weeks. Pertussis can cause violent and rapid coughing, over and over, until the air is gone from the lungs and the person is forced to inhale with a loud "whooping" sound. In infants, the cough can be minimal or not even there.

The best way to prevent pertussis or minimize its effects is to get vaccinated. Pertussis vaccines are very safe and effective in protecting you from disease. While no vaccine is 100% effective, someone who becomes infected with pertussis and who is vaccinated usually experiences less severe illness. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends a four-dose primary series of DTaP, administered at 2, 4, 6 and 15-18 months of age, followed by a fifth booster dose given at 4-6 years. The ACIP also offers the following recommendations regarding a booster vaccination for adolescents and adults, known as Tdap:

- Adolescents 11-18 years, preferably at the 11-12 year old check up.
- All healthcare personnel who have not yet received a dose of Tdap, regardless of age.
- All adults, including those over the age of 65, should receive Tdap for their next booster dose of tetanus containing vaccine, if they have not previously received it.
- All adults, including those over the age of 65, who have or who anticipate having close contact with an infant less than 12 months of age and who have not received Tdap, should receive a single dose to protect against pertussis and reduce the likelihood of transmission.
- All adult who wants to be protected from pertussis should receive this booster.
- New mothers who have never received Tdap should get a dose as soon as possible after delivery.

The Ocean County Health Department continues to stress the importance of hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, and staying home when sick. Hand washing is the single most important prevention method to avoid the spread of disease.

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Residents with questions can call the Ocean County Health Department's pertussis information line at 732-341-9700 extension 7378 or send an email to pertussis@ochd.org. Information is also available via our website at www.ochd.org/pertussis.

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