

Teenage Health

Awareness Low On Disease Affecting Teens

(NAPSA)—Parents need to be aware of a serious illness that many wrongfully assume is no longer a threat: whooping cough (also known as pertussis). Whooping cough is a highly contagious disease and cases in the U.S. are steadily increasing. In 2003, 39 percent of cases reported to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) affected children between the ages of 10 and 19. Outbreaks throughout the country have spread through schools and summer camps affecting teens in record numbers. There is growing concern within the public health community regarding the increase of pertussis cases across the United States.

Parents may not be aware that vaccination protection against pertussis wears off after five to 10 years, leaving many adolescents unprotected. Currently, no pertussis vaccine is licensed in the United States for use in persons seven years of age or older.

A recent survey conducted by the Society for Adolescent Medicine (SAM) revealed that less than one in five parents were concerned with the prospect of their teen contracting pertussis. The survey also highlighted that while 72 percent of parents believe it is very important that their adolescent have a routine checkup, only 27 percent are concerned about vaccinations during these visits.

Pertussis can be difficult to detect because the first symptoms are similar to the common cold or the flu (runny nose, mild fever and a cough). Adolescents usually do not have the classic “whoop” that is associated with the disease. Severe coughing spells can last more than two months and can lead to vomiting, a hernia, or even a broken rib. In some cases, pertussis can lead to pneumonia. Infants with the condition may actually stop breathing for a few seconds. Between coughing spells, it is typical for individuals to appear symptom-free. While the condition is rarely fatal in teens,

Whooping Cough Facts

- Childhood whooping cough vaccines wane after 10 years, meaning many adolescents are not protected from the disease.
- Early symptoms mimic the cold and flu, making it difficult to recognize.
- Advanced cases can cause vomiting, hernias and even broken ribs.
- For more information, visit www.adolescenthealth.org/whoopingcough.html.



the mortality rate is highest in unvaccinated infants—many of whom catch the cough from an infected family member. Diagnosis and treatment with antibiotics after the onset of persistent coughing fits may limit the spread of pertussis, but may have no noticeable impact on the symptoms.

SAM launched an educational campaign, called “More Than Just a Cough,” to increase awareness of pertussis trends and the implications for adolescents. The campaign also encourages parents to schedule a routine health visit to ensure their teens have completed their vaccination program and are therefore protected from other vaccine preventable diseases.

“We are very concerned about the rise in incidence levels in pertussis,” said Dr. Amy Middleman, assistant professor of pediatrics, Adolescent Medicine Section, Baylor College of Medicine. “Adding a pertussis component to the current tetanus-diphtheria booster vaccine routinely administered to 11 and 12 year-olds could help control community outbreaks and protect older children and teens from this serious and highly contagious disease.”

Such a vaccine is currently being reviewed by the FDA, and could be available in 2005. For more information about whooping cough, including its symptoms, visit the Web site www.adolescenthealth.org/whoopingcough.html.