

“Whooping Cough” On The Rise—New Resource To Help Parents Safeguard Children

(NAPSA)—Pertussis or “whooping cough,” as it is more commonly known, is a severe childhood disease that can cause long coughing spells, sometimes lasting for weeks on end. A sick child will often cough for five to ten minutes before drawing in air with a loud gasp, or “whoop” sound. Even though pertussis is preventable through regular childhood immunizations, more than 7,000 U.S. children contracted the disease last year.

In some cases, pertussis can cause pneumonia, swelling of the brain, ear infection, dehydration, anorexia, and even death. In order to raise awareness of this devastating disease, NAPNAP (The National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners) has recently launched www.pertussis.com, an educational tool to increase awareness of pertussis and better understand how it can be spread.

Pertussis.com answers the most frequently asked questions parents may have on the disease in both

English and Spanish. The Web site also allows the user to see and hear pertussis over the Internet.

Many parents don’t understand how infants can catch pertussis. Older children, adults, or parents may have a mild form of the dis-

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ease and not recognize it. In these mild cases of the disease, symptoms often mimic the common cold and the “whoop” sound, for which the disease is known, may not be present. But unsurprisingly, it is adults, adolescents, and older children who are the most common carriers of infection to more vulnerable infants and children in their own homes. Milder symptoms usually affect all age groups, but research points out that mild disease is increasing even among

school age children.

So far this year, unusually high numbers of pertussis-infected children in Texas, Arkansas, Washington, Ohio, Minnesota, Iowa, and Virginia show that the disease is on the rise. Since 1976 when U.S. cases reached an all-time low, the disease has made a steady comeback, in part due to under-immunization. It is important to remember that no child is protected against pertussis without completing the entire series of three immunizations with a DTaP vaccine.

Pertussis is one of the most contagious diseases known to affect children in the U.S. Young children under 12 months of age remain the highest risk group for severe illness, complications, and death. In 2000 alone, pertussis claimed the lives of 17 U.S. infants.

To get the facts on pertussis, visit www.pertussis.com to keep our families, schools, and communities pertussis-free.