

# *News from the Wyoming Department of Health*

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## **Wyoming Whooping Cough Reports Increase Sharply**

With a sharp increase in recent pertussis (whooping cough) cases reported to the Wyoming Department of Health, Wyoming's state health officer is encouraging awareness and vaccination to help protect vulnerable residents from the disease.

"Wyoming's level of pertussis activity right now is certainly a cause for concern," said Dr. Wendy Braund, state health officer and Public Health Division senior administrator with WDH. "In recent years, other states have seen significant outbreaks of this disease with sometimes deadly consequences."

Sixty-three pertussis cases have been reported to WDH so far this year, compared to a total of 59 in 2012, 13 in 2011 and 14 in 2010. "A high percentage of this year's cases have been reported over the last two months," Braund noted. Actual case numbers are likely higher because many cases are not identified as pertussis and others may not be reported to the department.

Pertussis typically begins with cold-like symptoms and perhaps a mild cough. Pertussis is often not suspected or diagnosed until a persistent cough with spasms sets in after one to two weeks. Infants and children can cough violently and rapidly with a loud "whooping" sound.

"We want healthcare providers and families to be aware of Wyoming's current situation with pertussis. Because it has not been especially common over the last several decades, it's not always recognized," Braund said.

The most severe danger is for babies. More than half of infants less than 1 year of age who become ill with pertussis must be hospitalized; in some cases it can be deadly. "Babies can catch the illness from a family member or other caregiver who may not realize they have the disease. Infants should be kept away from individuals who have an illness characterized by coughing," Braund said.

Pertussis is considered a vaccine-preventable disease; about half of Wyoming's cases this year involved children who had not been vaccinated. "We recommend residents stay up to date with their pertussis vaccines. They are not perfect, but effective," Braund said. "If you've been vaccinated and still become ill with pertussis, you are less likely to have a severe infection."

Braund said the Tdap adolescent/adult pertussis booster vaccine is important for those who spend time with new infants. "If you are pregnant or planning on becoming pregnant, you should talk to your doctor about a Tdap vaccine. It's also good to make sure all people around your baby are vaccinated, including siblings, grandparents, other family members and childcare staff."

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