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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 14, 2004

**PERTUSSIS (WHOOPIING COUGH) OUTBREAK IN WESTCHESTER
REACHES NEARLY 100 CASES**

Health Department encouraging timely childhood vaccination; suspect cases should consult a physician

The Westchester County Department of Health has identified 98 cases of confirmed pertussis (whooping cough) since August, 2003. Although the early cases were seen primarily in northern Westchester communities, cases have now been seen throughout the county. The highest numbers of cases were seen in August thru November. In the following months, the number of cases remained fairly stable, consistent with the seasonal nature of the disease that peaks in late summer or fall. Normally, only five to six cases per year of pertussis are reported in Westchester County.

“Finding these cases is in part the result of a new and better test for pertussis, done by obtaining a swab of the nose and throat areas, which is making it easier to find pertussis cases,” Dr. Lipsman continued. “Nevertheless, our purpose in announcing that we are nearing 100 cases in this outbreak is to encourage all parents to have their children vaccinated, and to ask medical providers to help to identify any possible additional cases of pertussis.”

Many causes can be attributed to this outbreak including:

- an underimmunized population
- increased awareness of the disease
- increased availability of the new test
- and less than perfect effectiveness of the existing vaccine.

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“Vaccination is not completely protective against pertussis or whooping cough. Even while appropriately vaccinated individuals can become ill and spread the infection to others, the illness is generally milder in vaccinated individuals,” stated Health Commissioner Joshua Lipsman, MD, MPH. “Also in young infants, pertussis remains a serious disease and can result in death. Five of the nine infants less than six months of age of our current pertussis cases were ill enough to require hospitalization,” added Dr. Lipsman. “Fortunately, they now are all out of danger and recovered at home,” he added.

Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is a highly contagious bacterial disease that affects the respiratory system and produces spasms of coughing that usually are accompanied by a characteristic high-pitched whoop. Whooping cough can affect people of any age. Prior to widespread immunization, the disease was a major cause of death in infants and young children. Appropriate immunization can usually prevent the occurrence of this serious disease. Parents and health care providers are urged to assure that children’s pertussis shots are up-to-date.

The cough is characterized by bursts of numerous rapid coughs accompanied by a characteristic whooping sound. Typically, the face becomes red with each cough then light blue. During this stage, there is heavy mucus production and coughing spells may cause vomiting. Pertussis should be considered when vomiting is associated with coughing. Coughing from pertussis typically lasts several weeks but may persist for up to ten weeks. Residents who wish to hear a short recording of the typical cough associated with “whooping cough” may visit our website at www.westchestergov.com/health.

Anyone developing symptoms of pertussis (whooping cough) should see a doctor for appropriate treatment. Prompt treatment can prevent complications and the spread of pertussis to others.

For more information on pertussis, call the Westchester County Department of Health at (914) 813-5000 or visit www.westchestergov.com/health.