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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**October 6, 2003**

**CORRECTED VERSION OF RELEASE SENT ON FRIDAY, OCTOBER 3<sup>rd</sup>  
CORRECTION IS: NEW TEST FOR PERTUSSIS IS A THROAT SWAB NOT A BLOOD TEST**

**PERTUSSIS (WHOOPING COUGH) OUTBREAK IN CORTLANDT AND PEEKSKILL  
Health Department encouraging timely childhood vaccination; suspect cases should consult a physician**

The Westchester County Department of Health has identified 19 cases of confirmed pertussis (whooping cough) since August, primarily in Cortlandt and Peekskill residents. Of the 19 cases, two are adults and 17 are children between three weeks and 14 years of age. The adults are either parents or caretakers of children who have pertussis. Many of the children are playmates or classmates of each other. Normally, only five to six cases per year of pertussis are reported in Westchester County.

Although these cases began in August, the outbreak continues and the most recent case was diagnosed on October 1st. In response to these cases of pertussis, 6400 letters have been sent out by schools and camps attended by affected children, notifying parents of their children's potential exposure to pertussis, alerting them to symptoms, and advising them to seek medical attention if ill with pertussis-like symptoms. Most children in this outbreak who have been diagnosed with pertussis had been appropriately vaccinated but some had not. As well, notices are being sent to Westchester County physicians.

"Because vaccination is not completely protective against pertussis or whooping cough, even appropriately vaccinated individuals can become ill and spread the infection to others, but the illness is generally milder in vaccinated individuals," stated Health Commissioner Joshua Lipsman, MD, MPH.

**MORE**

“We’re thinking that our finding these cases is in part the result of a new and better test for pertussis, done by obtaining a throat swab, which is making it easier to find pertussis cases,” Dr. Lipsman continued. “Nevertheless, our purpose in announcing this outbreak is to encourage unvaccinated children to be vaccinated, and to find any possible additional cases of pertussis.”

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 whoop. Typically, the face becomes red with each cough then subtly bluish. During this stage, there is heavy mucus production and coughing spells may induce 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](http://www.westchestergov.com/health).

Symptoms of pertussis include

- runny nose
- slight fever (up to 102° F)
- severe cough that may be dry or may produce phlegm
- severe bouts of coughing with a “whoop,” followed by vomiting
- choking spells in infants and young children

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

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