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Date: 6/8/2005 9:40:31 AM

Subject: RELEASE FROM THE WYOMING DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

June 8, 2005

*** FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE ***

Top State Health Official Backs Whooping Cough Booster Shot for Adolescents to Stem Rising Incident Rates in Wyoming

CHEYENNE - Wyoming Department of Health director, Dr. Brent Sherard, said today that he backs a study that encourages re-vaccinating adolescents against whooping cough.

Infants in Wyoming are routinely vaccinated against whooping cough, also called pertussis, but Sherard said the effectiveness of the vaccination may diminish by the time those children reach their teens. Sherard expressed concern in the rising numbers of whooping cough cases in the state in the past five years and said the booster may be effective as a way to stem the rise.

The study, published this week in the June edition of Pediatrics, suggested that if one age group, 11-year-olds, get one of two new whooping cough boosters it would prevent tens of thousands of cases in the U.S. at an acceptable cost. The study was co-authored by physicians from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Harvard Medical School.

From 2000 to 2002, the state tallied only 16 whooping cough cases. That number jumped significantly in 2003 when 130 cases were recorded and Wyoming had the highest incidence rate in the nation. Last year, the state recorded 25 cases and 14 have been discovered already this year. In recent years, Sherard said Montana, North Dakota, and Colorado have also seen large increases in people with whooping cough.

"This disease not only affects children but can cause serious morbidity in adults," he said. "Unfortunately it is often unrecognized in adults and goes untreated and they, in turn, can easily spread it to children. The new vaccines appear to provide substantial protection for young people."

Last month, the government approved GlaxoSmithKline's new pertussis booster vaccine, called Boostrix, for preteens and teenagers and approval is expected this month for Sanofi Pasteur's rival Adacel, targeted for use in ages 11 to 64. Both products add pertussis vaccine to a tetanus-diphtheria booster shot currently recommended for adolescents and adults every ten years.

Sherard said that Boostrix vaccine may be available at private physician offices in Wyoming as early as August. Pending approval from the CDC's Federal Vaccine for Children Program, the state of Wyoming will also provide this vaccine for eligible children. He suggested people contact their healthcare provider for more information on availability.

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Pertussis Facts

What is pertussis?

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is a highly contagious bacterial disease of the respiratory tract. The pertussis bacteria live in the mouth, nose, and throat of an infected person. The disease is most serious in infants and children of preschool age.

Who gets pertussis and how is it spread?

Although you can get pertussis at any age, 75% of those who are diagnosed with pertussis are children

under five years of age. Pertussis is contracted through direct contact or by breathing in airborne droplets containing the bacteria. The airborne droplets are created when an infected person sneezes, coughs, or even talks.

What are the symptoms of pertussis and when do they start?

Pertussis generally begins with mild flu-like symptoms that include a runny nose, sneezing, low-grade fever, and a slight cough. Within two weeks, the cough becomes more severe and is characterized by episodes of numerous rapid, violent coughs (cough paroxysm) followed by a crowing or high pitch whoop. A thick, clear mucous may be discharged. These episodes may recur for one to two months, and are more frequent at night. Infants under the age of six months and adults often do not have this distinctive whoop. The symptoms of pertussis are generally much milder in adults and adolescents, and in children who have been partially immunized. Pertussis symptoms usually start within five to ten days after exposure to an infected person, but may take as long as 21 days.

For how long is a person contagious?

A person with pertussis is contagious from the onset of the earliest symptoms to three weeks after the onset of coughing fits. However, the infectious period can be shortened considerably by taking medications as prescribed by a doctor. What is the treatment for pertussis? A 14-day course of antibiotics is used to treat pertussis. All household and close contacts of a person with pertussis should also take the medication (regardless of their immunization status) to keep from getting or spreading the illness to others.

Is there a vaccine for pertussis?

Yes. The pertussis vaccine is given together with diphtheria and tetanus vaccines in a combination shot called DTaP. DTaP is recommended at 2, 4, 6, and 15 months of age, plus a booster at 4 to 6 years of age or before entry into school, whichever comes first. Immunization with pertussis vaccine may not always provide complete or permanent protection. The best way to avoid getting pertussis is to get vaccinated, however the vaccine is not recommended for persons seven years of age or older.

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For more information, please contact:

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