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May 23, 2012

Release # 05-23

Pertussis confirmed on Eastern Shore of Virginia

Eastern Shore Residents urged to vaccinate

(Accomack, Va.)— The Eastern Shore Health District urges residents to take advantage of free Tdap vaccine while supplies last at the local health departments, as pertussis (“Whooping Cough”) has been confirmed in the district.

Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory disease spread from person to person by coughing and sneezing. It is caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*. The infection typically starts like a cold, with a runny nose, sneezing, and mild cough. The cough lasts 1-2 weeks and then worsens, occurring in fits sometimes followed by a whooping noise, gagging or vomiting. The disease can be very serious in children less than 1 year of age where it can cause lung infections and, less often, seizures or inflammation of the brain. In rare cases, pertussis can result in death, especially in infants. In 2010, there were 27,550 cases of the disease in infants nationwide; including 384 reported cases in Virginia.

“The single most effective way to prevent pertussis is vaccination,” said Henry Kurban, MD, director of the Eastern Shore Health District. “Protection from the childhood vaccine wears off over time, generally in five to ten years, so teens and adults should be revaccinated. Unfortunately, many teens and adults unknowingly contract and spread pertussis. They often are the source of infection for infants too young to be protected by vaccination. All parents, siblings, grandparents and caregivers of infants should make sure their pertussis vaccine is current, to help protect these vulnerable infant populations”.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention especially recommend pertussis vaccine for persons 65 or older who have close contact with infants, pregnant women, new mothers who are breastfeeding and health care or childcare professionals who have direct contact with infants and young children.

Anyone experiencing pertussis symptoms is urged to voluntarily isolate themselves at home and call their primary care physician in order to begin treatment as soon as possible. Close contacts of patients with pertussis will also be treated in order to prevent the additional spread of disease in the community.

To schedule your free Tdap vaccination, please call in Accomack County 757-787-5880 or in Northampton County 757-442-6228 to make an appointment. Tdap may also be available at your private physician’s office.

For more information about Pertussis, please visit <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/> or <http://www.cdc.gov/Features/Pertussis/>