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Whooping cough case confirmed in Stokes

by Meghann Evans
Managing Editor

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The Stokes County Health Department is reminding families to make sure people are current on their recommended vaccinations after the first confirmed case of pertussis, or "whooping cough," was reported in the county.

County Manager Rick Morris informed the Stokes County Board of Commissioners on Monday night that a student at Nancy Reynolds Elementary School had been diagnosed with whooping cough. The health department was informed of the illness last Friday and began working quickly to respond at the school with preventive measures.

According to Stokes County Health Director Scott Lenhart, county health staff responded at Nancy Reynolds on Tuesday to provide antibiotics to those determined to have primary contacts with the child — classmates and riders on the same school bus. Close to 90 people were supposed to receive the antibiotic. Lenhart said notifications were sent to parents of those students. The student with whooping cough is now doing fine, Lenhart said on Tuesday.

Lenhart said the student was up to date on all immunizations, but there is still a risk of contracting whooping cough even after receiving the vaccination. Lenhart said it does greatly reduce the chances of someone contracting a serious case of the illness.

Those at the school with no symptoms were allowed to return to school upon taking the antibiotic. Symptomatic students had to stay out for five days while taking the antibiotic. Anyone refusing the antibiotic could be required to stay out 21 days, stated Lenhart, who said he was following the recommended practice for containing whooping cough, which can have an incubation period of up to 21 days.

The Stokes County Health Department / Family Health Center is offering the pertussis vaccine to residents free of charge. In order to receive this vaccine from the health department, the person must be at least 10 years old. It is recommended for people who have not been vaccinated or are around infants regularly.

Pertussis or whooping cough is a highly contagious, respiratory disease that causes uncontrollable coughing, making it hard to breathe. The symptoms include runny or stuffy nose, sneezing, cough, or a pause in breathing for infants, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Anyone with these symptoms is encouraged to seek medical care from a primary care physician, health department or other health care facility.

Cases have been on the rise in the state in recent weeks. Last week state health officials reported that a two-month-old in Forsyth County had died from whooping cough, the first confirmed death from whooping cough this year in North Carolina. While most healthy older children and adults will see a full recovery from pertussis, infection in newborns can be particularly severe.

According to the health department, the CDC states that "pregnant women who have never had a dose of Tdap (Tetanus-Diphtheria-Pertussis) should get one, after the 20th week of gestation and preferably during the 3rd trimester. If they do not get Tdap during their pregnancy they should get a dose as soon as possible after delivery. Pregnant women who have previously received Tdap and need tetanus or diphtheria vaccine while pregnant should get Td (Tetanus-Diphtheria)."

If you would like to receive the vaccine at the health department, visit the Stokes County Health Center at 1009 Main Street, Danbury. If you have questions, contact the health department at 336-593-2400 or visit www.co.stokes.nc.us/health/index_files/news.htm to learn more about immunizations.

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