

23 February 2012

## FRASER HEALTH EXPANDS WHOOPING COUGH OUTBREAK RESPONSE

Fraser Health is urging all adults and youth who are in regular contact with young children, including pregnant women and their partners, to see their doctor or participating pharmacist and get the free whooping cough vaccine.

Since early December there have been more than 140 suspected or confirmed cases of whooping cough reported in Fraser Health. The true number of cases will be much greater than this. Cases were initially confined mostly to the eastern Fraser Valley communities of Hope, Chilliwack, and Harrison/Agassiz, but recently cases have been reported in several other Fraser Health communities, raising concern that the outbreak is spreading.

Whooping cough is a very contagious disease that causes severe coughing that may last for months. It can be a very serious illness in young children and babies, who have small airways. More than half of infants less than one year of age who get whooping cough must be hospitalized and in some cases, it is life threatening.

"The best protection against whooping cough is to get vaccinated," said Dr. Paul Van Buynder, Fraser Health's Chief Medical Health Officer. "The booster shot is especially important for those who have or expect to have close contact with infants and young children. The vaccine that most people get when they are children only offers protection for 4-10 years so there are many adults without adequate coverage."

Fraser Health is also encouraging parents to ensure their children are fully immunized and is asking healthcare professionals and the public in all Fraser Health communities to be alert for the signs and symptoms of whooping cough. Early diagnosis and treatment will help prevent the spread of the illness to those most at risk.

Free vaccine is available through doctors' offices and participating pharmacies for all adults and youth who have not had a whooping cough booster in the past five years and who are in regular contact with young children. A list of immunizing pharmacies can be found at [www.fraserhealth.ca/whoopingcough](http://www.fraserhealth.ca/whoopingcough).

To check your child's immunization records and make an appointment, if necessary, for childhood immunizations, contact your [local health unit](#) during regular business hours (Monday to Friday, 8:30 am - 4:30 pm).

### WHAT IS WHOOPING COUGH (PERTUSSIS)?

Whooping cough (pertussis) is a disease that causes very severe coughing that may last for months. Whooping cough is very contagious and can be a severe illness in those without adequate immunizations. Whooping cough spreads easily through the air when an infected person coughs, sneezes, or laughs, putting bacteria into the air. After the bacteria infect someone, symptoms appear about 7 to 14 days later.

Early symptoms are like those of a cold (sneezing, runny nose, a low fever and a mild cough). But over the next week or two, the cough gets worse leading to longer spells of coughing that often end with a whoop or crowing sound when the person breathes in. The coughing may be so bad that it makes a person gag or throw up. Sometimes a thick, clear mucous is spit out. This cough can last up to a month or two, and happens more at night.

Health care providers are reminded that whooping cough is a reportable condition which requires immediate notification to public health. Doctors should be alert to whooping cough if they see kids or adults with symptoms.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU/YOUR CHILD DEVELOPS SYMPTOMS?

If you/your child develops cold-like symptoms that you think may be whooping cough, you should be examined by a doctor. Call ahead so that you can be seen quickly and not expose other people by sitting in a waiting room for any period of time. You may also be examined in an isolation room (if available) and given a mask to wear, or, arrangements may be made for you to attend the clinic at a time when the waiting room is empty. Bring your/your child's immunization record with you.

### For more information:

[www.fraserhealth.ca/whoopingcough](http://www.fraserhealth.ca/whoopingcough)

<http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/kb/content/mini/hw65653.html#hw65655>