



NEWS RELEASE

ALABAMA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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Pertussis cases diagnosed in Calhoun, Talladega and Tallapoosa counties

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Alabama Department of Public Health announces that there have been six cases of pertussis diagnosed in children in Calhoun, Talladega and Tallapoosa counties since May 24. During this same period in 2003 there were no cases of pertussis in any of these counties. Case confirmation is pending on another child in Talladega.

Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is an acute infectious disease caused by a bacterium. It can occur in all age groups, but adolescents and adults usually have milder disease. Three adults have been diagnosed with pertussis in other counties of Alabama this year.

Pertussis occurs in stages. The first stage is characterized by a runny nose, sneezing, low-grade fever, and a mild, occasional cough. The symptoms are similar to those of a common cold.

In the second stage the cough becomes more severe over about a period of two weeks. The patient has bursts of numerous, rapid coughs. At the end of the coughing spell, the patient inhales deeply and may have a characteristic high-pitched whoop. Young infants and children appear very sick and distressed. Vomiting and exhaustion are common after coughing attacks, but patients usually appear normal between episodes.

In the final stage the cough usually disappears after two to three weeks. The cough can recur, however, with later respiratory infections for many months after the onset of pertussis.

Pertussis can cause secondary bacterial pneumonia, seizures and brain disorders, ear infection, loss of appetite and dehydration. Pertussis can also lead to death. The public is advised to call their doctor if they think they are having symptoms. Pertussis can be treated with antibiotics.

Vaccination against pertussis is given along with diphtheria and tetanus vaccine to children at 2, 4, 6, and 12 - 15 months of age and again as a preschool booster at 4 - 6 years of age. Pertussis immunity wanes as time passes, so adolescents and adults are susceptible to pertussis. There is currently no pertussis vaccine licensed for use in persons older than 6 years of age.