



Tom Barrett
Mayor

Bevan K. Baker, CHE
Acting Commissioner of Health



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City of Milwaukee Health Department Investigates Three Cases of Pertussis in UW-Milwaukee Students

***State, local and university officials working jointly to identify
transmission of disease on campus***

The City of Milwaukee Health Department (MHD) along with the Shorewood Health Department, State of Wisconsin Division of Public Health and the Norris Student Health Center at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee are conducting a follow-up investigation of three UW-Milwaukee students with confirmed or probable pertussis (whooping cough) infection. The investigation includes identifying persons who came into close contact with the three students during the period in which they were symptomatic and could transmit the disease. To date, fewer than 10 close contacts have been identified. In addition, the MHD has distributed approximately 2,000 letters to UWM students in an effort to identify other students who might possibly have been exposed to the disease. These letters provide recommendations by the MHD regarding monitoring for symptoms as well as use of antibiotics as prescribed by a physician if necessary in what the MHD expects to be a limited number of cases.

A press conference has been scheduled for today, Friday, May 21 at 3:00 p.m. in the Market Street entrance of the Municipal Building (841 N. Broadway).

“The primary role of the MHD in this investigation is to quickly identify all persons who had close contact with the student cases and prevent any future spread of pertussis in the community,” said Acting Health Commissioner Bevan K. Baker. “The approaching summer break in student classes, has created a sense of urgency resulting in close collaboration and action between the University and the MHD.”

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Pertussis is a contagious bacterial disease that affects the respiratory tract. It is spread by respiratory droplets from an infected person through coughing or sneezing. Exposure usually occurs after close indoor face-to-face contact (such as people sharing the same household). Symptoms begin 1-3 weeks after exposure, and are much like a cold with runny nose, and possible low-grade fever. The illness often progresses to spells of severe coughing that can interrupt breathing, eating and sleeping, and may be followed by vomiting and exhaustion.

Adults can develop a milder form of the disease (regardless of previous vaccination), but unvaccinated infants and children under the age of one with pertussis are the most susceptible and much more likely to become very seriously ill. A vaccine (DTaP) is available for children aged two months to six years, and all parents of children in this age group should make sure that their children's DTaP vaccines are up to date.

In recent months, the State of Wisconsin Division of Public Health has reported an increase in pertussis activity and cases in the southeast region of the state. As a result, local public health agencies and healthcare providers have been asked to enhance surveillance and reporting of pertussis. The MHD has been actively monitoring for pertussis in the city over the past six months.

Further information on pertussis can be found at www.milwaukee.gov/health

What: Press Conference on Pertussis Investigation
Where: Municipal Building
841 N. Broadway Avenue
Market Street Entrance
Time: 3:00 p.m.
Speakers: Bevan K. Baker, CHE, Acting Health Commissioner
Geof Swain, MD, MPH, Associate Medical Director

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