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DOH confirms additional case of whooping cough on Hawai'i Island

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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HONOLULU — The Hawai'i Department of Health (DOH) has confirmed one additional case of pertussis (also known as whooping cough) in a third distinct region on Hawai'i Island which is unrelated to previous cases. This new case closely follows 10 recently reported cases and brings the total to 11 pertussis cases on the Island from March – April 2024. Several of the recent cases have occurred in infants too young to be fully vaccinated.

These recent cases indicate community spread of pertussis on Hawai'i Island. DOH strongly recommends staying up to date with pertussis vaccinations. This is very important for infants, young children, those with underlying medical conditions and their close contacts. We want to protect these vulnerable groups who are more likely to develop severe whooping cough.

Pertussis vaccination can usually be obtained from a primary care provider such as a pediatrician, family physician, internal medicine physician, or nurse practitioner. Calling ahead to confirm pertussis vaccine availability is recommended. Those who do not have a primary care provider can contact their health plan or can contact a federally qualified health center if they do not have health insurance.

Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory infection caused by bacteria. It can cause severe coughing fits (up to 10 weeks or more), followed by a high-pitched “whoop” sound when breathing in. Vomiting and exhaustion may also follow. Pertussis can lead to serious complications, especially in infants, such as pneumonia, dehydration, seizures, and brain damage. Some infants may not cough at all. Instead, they may have apnea (life-threatening pauses in breathing) or struggle to breathe.

See a doctor as soon as possible if you or your child is experiencing symptoms, such as runny nose, fever and coughing violently and rapidly.

Call 9-1-1 immediately if you or your child is:

- Struggling to breathe
- Turning blue or purple

The best way to protect you and your loved ones is to stay up to date with recommended pertussis vaccines. Two vaccines used in the U.S. are DTaP and Tdap. It is recommended that infants and children complete a series of DTaP doses, while adolescents should receive one dose of Tdap, preferably at age 11 or 12 years old. Women should get a Tdap dose during the third trimester of each pregnancy to help protect their babies early in life. Those regularly around young infants such as family and household members should especially ensure they are up to date with recommended pertussis vaccines.

Based on data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Hawai'i's 2022-2023 kindergarten coverage rate for DTaP was 87.0% compared to a national average of 92.7%. With our coverage rate declining, there is increased risk for continued disease spread in our community. Parents who are hesitant about vaccination are encouraged to discuss their concerns with their child's healthcare provider.

If you are diagnosed with pertussis, take antibiotics as prescribed and avoid contact with others until you are no longer contagious. People can spread the bacteria from the start of the very first symptoms and for up to three weeks after coughing fits begin. Taking antibiotics early in the illness may shorten the amount of time someone is contagious. If you are interested in learning more about symptoms and treatment access the CDC [website](#).

CDC recommends practicing good hygiene to prevent the spread of the bacteria that cause pertussis and other respiratory illnesses:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze.
- Throw away used tissues in a waste basket right away.
- Cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow if you don't have a tissue. Never cough into your hands as germs can be spread this way.
- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds.
- Use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.

For more information about pertussis (whooping cough), please visit the CDC [website](#).

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