



# *Town of Darien*

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## *Health Department*

### **Pertussis (Whooping Cough) in Darien**

In reviewing health data available to the Darien Health Department, there have been 25 confirmed cases of pertussis (Whooping Cough) reported since 2008. This represents an incidence rate of 4.2 per year in a town with 22,000 residents. At first glance that may not seem to be a high number, but Centers for Disease Control (CDC) data from 2012 reports that the national incidence rate for pertussis was 3.3 per 22,000 people. It is important to note that the actual incidence rate very likely exceeds the number of reported cases because many physicians simply diagnose and treat the illness without laboratory confirmation meaning the case is not reported. Another reason for under reporting is that pertussis symptoms are often vague and may be misdiagnosed.

So what does that mean to us? Can we conclude that there is a pertussis outbreak in Darien? Maybe yes, maybe no. There are many potential explanations for the increase in reported cases such as better diagnosis and reporting, and greater access to health care. What we can conclude is that pertussis is present here in town and, most importantly, is preventable.

#### **A little history regarding pertussis:**

Pre-1940, there were approximately 200,000 cases diagnosed in the United States per year. However, with the advent of the pertussis vaccine, that number dropped to approximately 1000 cases per year by 1970. Given the morbidity and mortality of “whooping cough”, the vaccine was a significant break through. However, in 2005, the Center for Disease Control shows that there were approximately 25,000 cases in the United States, which clearly indicates a resurgence of this disease. And those numbers continue to climb.

#### **Why the increase in illness?**

There are several theories as to why. The primary concern is that there appears to be a decrease in childhood vaccination rates due to concerns regarding vaccines and a lack of awareness about the implications of the disease itself. Another likely cause is the antibodies derived from the childhood vaccination disappear as patients mature into adulthood. If so, the solution to that problem is quite easy. Adults need boosters.

#### **What should we do?**

The CDC recommends that adults receive one pertussis booster during their lifetime. This is particularly important for adults in families where there are babies and infants who are particularly susceptible to the disease. Adults who receive their booster not only protect themselves; they protect those around them who might be more susceptible. The CDC also recommends that children receive their vaccine via the DTAP series.

To update all of your vaccines and to learn more, speak with your physician.

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