

WHOOPIING COUGH STILL EXISTS EVEN THOUGH MANY IGNORE ITS PRESENCE

New Study Reports Most Parents Unaware of Dangers

(Murfreesboro, Tenn., June 22, 2011)---A large percentage of the area population has not been immunized against pertussis, also known as whooping cough, even though the little-discussed disease is one of the most potent respiratory diseases around.

According to a recent research study led by Shannon Beckman, Pharm. D. for Reeves-Sain here, many adults are not vaccinated, nor do they understand the risks associated with pertussis. The study, based on research with parents of small children regarding their knowledge of whooping cough and vaccinations offered, showed that only one-third of parents were fully aware of the dangers of whooping cough and recommendations for prevention. Although 64% knew the current recommendations for the vaccine, one-third of the respondents did not know that the disease is life threatening for infants.

The most important finding according to Dr. Beckman, is that less than half of the parents surveyed knew that this potentially fatal contagious disease is most often transmitted from parents to their children. "Up to 80% of babies catch the disease from family members. Unvaccinated adults can contract and spread the disease, often without even realizing it. When parents get vaccinated, they are not only caring for their own health, but also protecting their baby and the rest of the community."

"We were surprised with the results," Beckman said. "As pharmacists, we keep up on diseases and their treatments, so for us, whooping cough is well-known and understood. But the number of people who are just not aware of the severity of this illness concerns us, because small infants are at the greatest risk. We are hopeful that through this research we can raise awareness of whooping cough so that parents can prevent its spread."

Pertussis, or whooping cough, is an acute respiratory bacterial infection caused by *Bordetella pertussis*. Whooping cough causes severe coughing spells for an extended time and is most severe when it occurs early in life. After the introduction of pertussis-containing vaccines in the 1940s, the number of cases and deaths due to whooping cough declined dramatically reaching it's lowest point in the mid-1970s. In recent years, however, there has been an increase in whooping cough cases globally, as well as locally. A retrospective study at Vanderbilt Medical Center in Nashville, Tennessee showed a remarkable increase in infants, with 45 cases in 1998-2002 compared to only 2 cases in the prior decade.

In 2005, Adacel® was introduced to the market as the first Tdap vaccination, containing Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis antigens. According to the CDC's Advisory Committee in Immunization Practices (ACIP), adults aged 19–64 years should receive a single dose of Tdap to replace a single dose of a normally scheduled tetanus shot. More recently, the CDC has recommended a dose of Tdap in those older than 65 years with close contact with infants.

In addition to the surveys, Reeves-Sain has increased its counseling of parents on the need for the Tdap vaccine. Along with typical counseling in the drug store, the pharmacy is promoting the vaccine with flyers, mailers, and letters to local physicians.

“We were encouraged that almost 75% of our surveyed adults had been vaccinated for whooping cough. But we also are aware that the population interviewed in our pharmacy is obviously deeply invested in their child’s health. Actual vaccination rates are more than likely much lower in the community, Beckman said. “We are currently monitoring our Tdap immunization rates to show that a pharmacist intervention increases vaccinations. And we will continue to educate this community on whooping cough in order to minimize its impact on the residents of this area.”

Reeves-Sain, founded in 1980 and locally owned throughout its existence, is a comprehensive medical operation, providing everything from medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, diabetes and oxygen services to a range of other programs such as an in-store soda shoppe. The company also operates a pharmacy-only service in the Murfreesboro Medical Clinic. More information is available at www.reevessain.com

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