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Parents: Don't wait to vaccinate children for whooping cough (pertussis) *Health Department to host Tdap-only clinics in March, April and May*

BLOOMINGTON— Starting in the 2012-2013 school year, all students entering, advancing or transferring into sixth grade and students entering/advancing/transferring into ninth grade will need proof of an adolescent pertussis (also known as whooping cough) booster immunization for school in the fall. The pertussis booster is called “Tdap.”

Pertussis (whooping cough) causes violent coughing spells characterized by a crowing or high-pitched whoop when inhaling, which can lead to difficulty breathing, vomiting, and disturbed sleep. The immunity received from either early childhood immunization (DTaP/DTP/DT) or the pertussis disease wears off over time, leaving adolescents and adults susceptible again to pertussis.

Numerous pertussis outbreaks have occurred among Illinois school children, leading the state legislature to pass a law in September 2011 requiring students entering sixth and ninth grades to show proof they received the Tdap vaccine. All students entering sixth and ninth grades must have the Tdap vaccine as part of their school physicals before the first day of class in the 2012-2013 school year.

Parents should review their child's immunization card to check if he or she had the pertussis booster called Tdap. If Tdap is required, children must visit their regular health care provider to get Tdap and other recommended vaccines as soon as possible. Several pharmacies may provide Tdap vaccine to students ages 14 years and older. Families should check with individual pharmacies.

Uninsured or underinsured students and students with a medical card can receive the Tdap vaccine through the McLean County Health Department. The health department will host Tdap-only evening clinics from 3:30 to 5:45 p.m. Mondays, March 5, April 9, and May 7, 2012. To schedule an immunization appointment, call 309-888-5455.

The health department suggests parents not wait until August 2012 to get their children vaccinated. Schools are required to not allow your child to attend the first day of school without proof of receiving the Tdap vaccination. For more information about Tdap and pertussis, please visit <http://health.mcleancountyil.gov/tdap>.

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