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media release

Whooping cough on the increase

Hunter New England Health is reminding parents to ensure their children are fully immunised against whooping cough (pertussis) following an increase of cases in the region.

People working with or caring for young children (particularly parents and grandparents) should have a booster immunisation to reduce the chance of spreading the disease.

So far this year there have been 294 cases notified in the Hunter New England Health region compared to 222 for the same time in 2007. The total number of cases for 2007 were 264, there were 537 cases in 2006 and 561 in 2005.

Health Protection Manager Peter Massey said whooping cough can be a serious disease for people of any age, but it can be particularly serious in babies.

“Pertussis is very infectious and can easily be spread among people who have close contact. Many babies admitted to hospital with whooping cough catch it from a parent or close family member,” Mr Massey said.

“Unfortunately being vaccinated or having had whooping cough does not provide lifelong immunity. Therefore many people who care for young children no longer have immunity even if they were vaccinated as children.

“Women that contract whooping cough in the last weeks of their pregnancy may pass it on to their vulnerable newborn child if they are not diagnosed and treated.”

Coughing then develops into bouts which may be followed by a deep gasp or ‘whoop’. Young children may stop breathing during the coughing attacks and require hospitalisation.

“Apart from keeping small children and babies away from those with a coughing illness, the best way to protect them is to ensure their vaccinations are up-to-date,” Mr Massey said.

Vaccinations for pertussis are given at two, four and six months of age. A booster should be given at four years of age and again at 15-years of age. This is free from your GP. Vaccination of parents and carers of children reduces the risk that they may pass whooping cough on.

Further information on whooping cough can be found on the NSW Health website at <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/factsheets/infectious/pertussis.html>

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