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Morris residents may be at risk for whooping cough

Health Management Office tracking cases and educating public

*By Michael Daigle
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The Morris County Office of Health Management is leading an education effort to raise awareness of dangerous staph infections and pertussis, or whooping cough, a disease once thought to be eradicated.

Public health epidemiologist Namitha Narayan told the Morris freeholder board Tuesday that her office is tracking incidents of community acquired Methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus, or MRSA, and keeping an eye on the number of reported cases of pertussis.

The health management office's efforts follow by a few months the rollout of a plan by the Morris Regional Public Health Partnership to reach out to schools, day-care centers and public health officials about the need to monitor MRSA cases.

Last year MRSA cases were reported at several schools and colleges statewide, including County College of Morris, Centenary College and Fairleigh Dickinson University.

The number of reported pertussis cases has fluctuated over the past 20 years, according to health statistics.

The largest number, 83, was reported in 1993, and the smallest total was one, in 2001, according to the 2007 Morris County Health Improvement Plan. Last year, the state Department of Health and Senior Services reported 24 cases of pertussis in Morris County.

Health educator Arlene Stoller said that MRSA was once a hospital-acquired condition, but since 1980 has become a concern because it is now commonly community based.

Her office has sent information packets to schools and other public facilities to alert officials to the need to monitor potential MRSA case in their facilities. Schools can be prime locations for MRSA outbreaks, she said, especially in gymnasiums. Schools needs to sanitize wrestling mats particularly well, she said.

The concern with pertussis, Stoller said, is that adults might be susceptible to the disease because their original vaccinations could have weakened. Adults should ask their doctors about a possible booster shot, she said.

Freeholder John Murphy asked how this information is disseminated to facilities such as nursing homes.

Stoller said she visits any place or group that requests a meeting.

Additional Facts

Need help?

The Morris County Health Management Office can be reached at (973) 631-5484.
