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## **Central Virginia Health District Advises of Increase in Pertussis Cases among College Aged Students in the Lynchburg Area**

LYNCHBURG, Va.– The Central Virginia Health District (CVHD) are informing students, faculty and staff of Liberty University, other colleges in the area, and the surrounding community at large of a recent increase in reported pertussis (commonly referred to as whooping cough).

Central Virginia Health Department staff are working closely with local healthcare providers to identify and treat potential cases. It is important that any ill individual stay away from others to prevent the spread of the infectious disease.

The majority of the recently diagnosed cases have been previously vaccinated, so it is important to be aware that you can still get pertussis if you have been vaccinated in the past. The effectiveness of the vaccine varies and may decrease over time. This does not mean that you should not get the vaccine. The current vaccine prevents illness for the majority who receive it and it also helps to prevent severe respiratory illness, hospitalizations and/or death in infants and immune compromised or elderly individuals.

Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by bacteria spread through the air in droplets from sneezing or coughing. The illness typically begins with “cold-like” symptoms – runny nose, sneezing, mild fever and cough. Newly infected persons are most contagious during the first two weeks of illness when cold-like symptoms are present and continues to be contagious through the third week after the onset of cough. If left untreated, infected individuals may develop a more severe respiratory illness that includes coughing fits accompanied by difficulty breathing, gagging or vomiting, or a cough that is followed by a high pitched “whooping” noise as the person tries to catch his or her breath.

Someone experiencing pertussis symptoms should seek medical evaluation and avoid public or group settings. Anyone diagnosed and being treated for pertussis is reminded to take all medications as prescribed (typically 5-day course of antibiotics) and to stay at home and avoid group activities for the five days to avoid infecting others. The health department also recommends keeping infants and other high-risk individuals away from anyone with a respiratory like illness including those confirmed/suspected cases of pertussis.

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The best way to prevent the spread of pertussis is by vaccinating all babies, children, teens and adults that are able to be vaccinated. Consult with a health care provider to see if another vaccine might be needed to protect against pertussis.

Like many other respiratory illnesses, including the common cold and flu, pertussis is spread by coughing and sneezing while in close contact with others, who then breathe in bacteria. Practice good hygiene to prevent the spread of pertussis:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough or sneeze. If you do not have a tissue, you can cough or sneeze into your upper sleeve or elbow, not your hands.
- Wash your hands frequently with soap and water for at least 20 seconds. If you do not have access to a sink with soap, alcohol-based hand sanitizers may be used.
- Do not share food, drinks, vaping products or anything that has come into contact with someone else's saliva.
- If you're ill, stay at home.

Please consult a primary health care provider for additional questions or concerns about pertussis. If you do not have a primary health care provider and would like to speak with someone about the increase in cases of pertussis and risk of infection, you may contact the Central Virginia Health District at 434-477-5973 and ask to speak with a public health nurse or contact CVHD Epidemiologist Kamella Peirce at 434-332-9550 ext. 142.

For more information on pertussis, visit

<https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/epidemiology/epidemiology-fact-sheets/pertussis-whooping-cough/> or <https://www.cdc.gov/pertussis/index.html>.

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