

Whooping cough reappears

Pertussis (whooping cough) has made a reappearance in Alaska after many years. Dr. Harry Colvin, Chief of Laboratories, announced that four cases of pertussis have been positively identified by the Southeast Regional Laboratory in Juneau. Two of the cases were reported by a Juneau pediatrician and the other two were from Hoonah.

Dr. Colvin said, "I'm not too surprised to see a resurgence of this disease. There are several reasons why it can make a comeback after the Division of Public Health had eradicated it in Alaska."

"First, there is a shortage of the vaccine. Several expensive lawsuits resulting from adverse reactions to the vaccine have resulted in only one drug company manufacturing it. Second, many parents are reluctant to pay for it now that the State no longer

furnishes it free to physicians. Third, because of the large amount of media publicity surrounding the few adverse reactions to the vaccine, many parents are misguidedly reluctant to have their children receive it. People tend to think of whooping cough as just another minor childhood ailment, but it used to be one of the worst killers of children in this country."

"There are other problems involved with this disease as well," Colvin said. "Since doctors see few or no cases these days, they are not particularly aware of it, and its symptoms are similar to those of several other illnesses. It is also difficult to culture in the laboratory, but we've been having good success with a special culture media. There is no reason we can't eliminate this disease if parents will just make sure their children undergo the recommended vaccination series."