



Protecting your family can be the best gift

As we head into the last few weeks of the year, the holiday season reminds us of gathering with family and friends. The holidays are also a time when the flu and whooping cough (pertussis) are making their rounds. It should come as no surprise that the keys to protecting your family from both are the same: Wash your hands, cover your cough, and stay home if you're sick. And the most important thing to do is to make sure you and all your family members have been vaccinated against both illnesses.

You probably have seen news reports about increased numbers of pertussis cases in McHenry and DuPage counties. Although the number of cases here in Kane County has been moderate this year (35 since Jan. 1, compared to 31 all of last year), we may see more before the end of the year or early next year. All of us need to be proactive and practice good prevention methods to ensure a healthy holiday. Because pertussis is so highly contagious, we often see the infection spread rapidly through school environments. In September of this year, a new law took effect in Illinois requiring students to receive the pertussis vaccines. The law states in part:

- Beginning with school year 2011-12, any child entering sixth grade shall show proof of receiving one dose of Tdap (defined as tetanus, diphtheria, acellular pertussis) vaccine regardless of the interval since the last DTaP, DT or Td dose.
- Students entering grades seven through 12 who have not already received Tdap are required to receive 1 Tdap dose regardless of the interval since the last DTaP, DT or Td dose.

Pertussis vaccines are very effective in protecting you from the disease but no vaccine is 100% effective. If pertussis is circulating in the community, there is a chance that a fully vaccinated person, of any age, can catch it and become ill. If you have been vaccinated, the infection is usually less severe.

Unfortunately, at this time of year we can always count on the flu, which tends to peak in January, February and March. Symptoms can range from mild to serious requiring hospitalization. Now is the right time to run down to get your shot. It's a quick and easy way to protect yourself and your family, which could wind up being the best gift you can give this year—Good Health. Remember the three Cs: Clean your hands, Cover your cough and Contain the disease. And get your flu shot! If you would like more information about the flu or pertussis, you can find it on the Health Department's Web site at www.kanehealth.com/communicable_disease.htm.

