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INCREASING NUMBER OF WHOOPING COUGH CASES: NORMAN FOWLER'S STATEMENT

Norman Fowler, Secretary of State for Social Services, issued the following statement today (Wednesday) on the publication of the latest weekly figures on the number of cases of whooping cough.

Mr Fowler said, "These are very disturbing figures. They show that the number of cases of whooping cough are still on the increase and could well go higher over the next few months.

"There have already been over 30,000 cases of whooping cough this year and some babies have died. This underlines the case for immunisation.

"In the years when the majority of babies were being vaccinated against the disease, whooping cough was kept in check, but in the last 6 years, less than half the babies who could have been vaccinated have received the benefit of this preventive measure.

"Both as Secretary of State and as a parent, I can appreciate why some parents have felt reservations about vaccinating their children. But extensive research has shown that there is considerably greater risk to babies and young children of severe illness and lasting complications from the disease—even of death — than of reaction to the vaccination itself. The risk of an unvaccinated child contracting the disease is between 1 in 16 and 1 in 30 and that of a child dying is 1 in 3,000. The risk of irreversible brain damage from whooping cough

vaccination is estimated at about 1 in 100,000 children immunised.

"It is customary to think of vaccination against whooping cough in relation to babies in the early months of life. What parents may not appreciate is that, even if their babies were not then vaccinated against whooping cough, this vaccination can be given separately, later, to infants. I urge parents to consider taking young children to their family doctor or local clinic to consult about the desirability of vaccinating them now.

"As recently as last Winter, I warned parents of the dangers of leaving children unprotected by vaccination and encouraged health authorities to run publicity campaigns locally to encourage parents to consider vaccination. There are encouraging signs that uptake of vaccination has been increasing - this reached a low of 31% in 1978 but had risen to about 45% by last year. This is still not really good enough and I sincerely hope that parents are now thinking carefully about getting their children protected before the disease becomes even more prevalent - as we expect it will do in the Winter months. Since it takes 3 months for a course of vaccination to become fully effective they should consider acting now."

Note to Editors : The Department of Health and Social Security is launching a national advertising campaign to encourage parents to consider vaccination during the next fortnight.