Pertussis: Protect Your Loved Ones

Facts About The Disease

- Pertussis, commonly known as whooping cough, is caused by bacteria (*Bordetella pertussis*) that produce intense fits of coughing. It can cause spells so bad that it is hard for infants and children to eat, drink, or breathe for weeks.
- Pertussis is highly contagious and is spread from person to person through personal contact, coughing and sneezing.
- In young children, pertussis is often identified by the “whooping” sound that they make as they desperately try to catch their breath between coughs. In adolescents and adults, the disease often appears to be just a bad cold with symptoms such as a prolonged cough with no “whooping” sounds.
- Pertussis is most severe for infants. More than half of infants younger than 1 year of age who contract the disease must be hospitalized. About 1 in 5 infants with pertussis develop pneumonia, and about 1 in 100 will experience convulsions. In some cases (1 in 100), pertussis can be deadly, especially in infants.
- Ninety percent (90%) of pertussis-associated deaths have been among babies less than 1 year old.
- Pertussis is the most common vaccine-preventable disease in the U.S. Before the vaccine for pertussis was developed there were about 200,000 cases of pertussis each year in the United States with about 8,000 deaths from the disease yearly.
- In 2010, there were 27,550 reported cases of pertussis in the U.S., and the disease was declared an epidemic in several states that were experiencing a high number of cases. In 2011, 18,719 confirmed pertussis cases were reported; in 2012, there were 48,277 cases of pertussis and 20 deaths; and in 2013, there were over 24,000 confirmed cases of pertussis in the U.S.

Why All Family Members Need to Be Vaccinated Against Pertussis

- During a pertussis outbreak, children who have received all five doses of their pertussis vaccinations are 8 times less likely to become infected with pertussis than those who have never been vaccinated.
- Pertussis vaccines are very effective in protecting people 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 the disease. If a person has been has been vaccinated, the pertussis infection is usually less severe. Vaccinated children who get pertussis usually have a milder course of disease and reduced risk of severe complications. They are also less likely to spread the illness than unvaccinated children.
- In up to 83% of infant pertussis cases, babies are infected by their own family members, usually a parent. Most unvaccinated children living with a family member with pertussis will contract the disease.
Summary of Pertussis Vaccination Recommendations

- **Children should receive 5 doses of DTaP**, a combined tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis vaccine. One dose is needed at each of the following ages: 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, between 15-18 months and between 4-6 years. Children are not fully protected until they receive all doses of the vaccine.

- **Tdap, a combined tetanus-diphtheria-pertussis vaccine, is given to older children, teens and adults.** Currently, Tdap is recommended only for a single dose during a person’s lifetime.
  - **Children 7 through 10 years old**, who are not up-to-date with DTaP vaccines, should receive a dose of Tdap before the 11-12 year old check up. *Parents should check with their children’s doctor to find out if they are up-to-date with their vaccinations.*
  - **Preteens (11 to 12 years old)** should obtain the Tdap booster during their regular check-ups.
  - **Teens and young adults who didn’t get a booster of Tdap as a preteen** should get one dose when they visit their doctor. Their next regular tetanus and diphtheria booster shot should be Td, which is then given every 10 years.
  - **Adults (19 years old and older)** who have not previously received a dose of Tdap vaccine should get a single dose of Tdap instead of their next regular tetanus (Td) booster shot. The Td shot is recommended for adults every 10 years; however, adults are encouraged not to wait 10 years between their last Td booster and this single dose of Tdap.
  - **Those considering pregnancy** should talk to their doctors about getting a Tdap vaccination (if indicated) prior to conception.
  - **Women should be vaccinated with Tdap during each pregnancy regardless of their prior history for receiving Tdap.** Tdap is very safe in all trimesters and can be given at any time, but preferably during the third trimester (between the 27th and 36th week of pregnancy) to give a child the most protection when he/she is born. If the vaccine is received during pregnancy, maternal antibodies will transfer to the newborn, and provide protection against pertussis in early life, before the baby’s first dose of DTaP vaccine. Tdap will also protect the mother at time of delivery, making her less likely to transmit pertussis to her infant.
  - **Postpartum women who were not vaccinated during pregnancy** should receive the Tdap vaccine before leaving the hospital or birthing center.
  - **Tdap is particularly important for families and caregivers of newborns.** Parents should proactively request that all those who will be in contact with the newborn, including healthcare personnel, get a Tdap vaccination. Ideally, these people should receive Tdap at least 2 weeks before beginning close contact with the infant. The strategy of protecting infants by vaccinating those around them is called “cocooning.”

**Pertussis Resources**

- ECBT’s Vaccinate Your Baby Campaign- [www.vaccinateyourbaby.org/why/history/pertussis.cfm](http://www.vaccinateyourbaby.org/why/history/pertussis.cfm)
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) - [www.cdc.gov/pertussis](http://www.cdc.gov/pertussis)
- MMWR Weekly Reports: Notifiable Diseases and Mortality Tables (Table II) - [www.cdc.gov/mmwr/mmwr_wk/wk_cvol.html](http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/mmwr_wk/wk_cvol.html)