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Frequently Asked Questions About Pertussis (whooping cough)

In July, 2010 the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) declared an epidemic of pertussis (whooping cough) throughout the state. As of August 10, 2010 there was a seven-fold increase in the number of cases being reported in 2010 compared to the previous year. Sacramento County in particular has seen a significant increase in reported pertussis cases.

What is pertussis (whooping cough)?

Pertussis (whooping cough) is a highly contagious bacterial infection that is spread in the air by breathing in respiratory droplets or aerosols from a person infected with pertussis. This disease can cause serious illness in infants, children and adults.

What are the symptoms of pertussis?

The disease starts like the common cold, with runny nose or congestion, sneezing, and maybe a mild cough or fever. Sometime in the first 2 (two) weeks, severe coughing spells develop that may end in vomiting or cause a “whoop” sound when the person tries to breathe in.

What actions can I take to protect myself from pertussis?

The best way to prevent pertussis is to get vaccinated. The easiest thing for adults to do is to get Tdap instead of their next regular tetanus booster which should be done every 10 years. The dose of Tdap can be given earlier than the 10-year mark, so it's a good idea for adults to talk to a healthcare provider about what's best for their specific situation. Parents can help protect infants by keeping them away, as much as possible, from anyone who has cold symptoms or is coughing. Parents should also encourage anyone who will be in contact with an infant to get vaccinated.

Who should get vaccinated?

- ANYONE 7 years old or older, including those older than 64
- Women of child-bearing age before, during or immediately after pregnancy
- Anyone who has contact with pregnant women, newborns or infants

Where can I find reliable information about pertussis?

The following websites have reliable information: California Department of Public Health (CDPH) website: <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Pertussis.aspx> AND Centers for Disease Control (CDC) website: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/pertussis/default.htm>