



JONATHAN E. FIELDING, M.D., M.P.H.
Director and Health Officer

ROBERT KIM-FARLEY, M.D., M.P.H.
Director, Communicable Disease Control and Prevention

Immunization Program

MICHELLE T. PARRA, Ph.D., Director
A. NELSON EL AMIN, M.D., M.P.H., Medical Director

3530 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 700
Los Angeles, California 90010
TEL (213) 351-7800 • FAX (213) 351-2780

www.publichealth.lacounty.gov

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PERTUSSIS ALERT: LOS ANGELES COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH REPORTS THE HIGHEST NUMBER OF PERTUSSIS DEATHS IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY IN AT LEAST 15 YEARS

The fourth pertussis death in an infant less than 3 months of age, in Los Angeles County, occurred this past weekend. This occurrence is a reminder of the seriousness of infant pertussis.

As most providers are probably aware, the California Department of Public Health declared a statewide epidemic of pertussis on June 23rd, 2010 and Los Angeles County is experiencing a pertussis resurgence as well. The current year-to-date total of confirmed or probable cases in Los Angeles County exceeds that for all 12 months of 2009. A previous local health alert gave information about diagnosis, treatment, and reporting of suspect pertussis cases to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health and is available on the web site: www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip.

One common theme among the infant pertussis deaths is that they all had multiple visits to healthcare providers, prompted by parental concern about the infant's breathing difficulty. In several instances, the examining clinician was unimpressed by the infant's symptoms at the time of examination and treated the infant only for nasal congestion or mild URI. When the infants developed severe respiratory distress, it was usually too late for any intervention to prevent their tragic deaths.

Remember the axiom that "if a diagnosis is not considered, it will not be made." Many infants with pertussis will not have the typical cough or whoop seen with older children. During the current pertussis resurgence, any infant presenting with a history of respiratory difficulty should be evaluated and treated for pertussis until proven otherwise. Because infants cannot be expected to have significant immunological protection against pertussis until receipt of the third primary DTaP immunization, normally given at 6 months of age, they **will** develop severe illness if infected with *Bordetella pertussis* bacteria.

Please report all suspect cases of pertussis among infants, children, adolescents, and adults to Public Health within one working day of identification (Phone: (888) 397-3993 or Fax: (888) 397-3778). For suspect cases that reside in the cities of Long Beach or Pasadena, please report to their respective health departments. Do not wait until PCR or culture results are available before reporting the suspect case. Timely reporting will allow Public Health to initiate contact investigation and ensure the prophylaxis of susceptible contacts such as infants. If technical assistance is needed, please consult the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Immunization Program Surveillance Unit at (213) 351-7800.

As a final note, please help protect young infants from exposure to pertussis by implementing the widespread use of Tdap rather than using Td or TT, particularly in women of childbearing age, postpartum women, adolescents, and other close contacts to infants.