

October is Breast Health Awareness Month and Domestic Violence Awareness Month. We would also like to draw attention to the current epidemic of pertussis and thank the LA County Department of Public Health Immunization Program for developing the October Health Note.

Pertussis (whooping cough)

California is experiencing a pertussis epidemic with the highest number of cases reported since 1950. Doctors and public health officials are urging individuals to get vaccinated and to take other preventive measures to prevent the spread of pertussis.

Pertussis is contagious. Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is a respiratory infection caused by bacteria that is spread primarily through droplets from coughs or sneezes of infected individuals.

Symptoms

The early symptoms of whooping cough are a runny nose or congestion, sneezing, coughing, watery eyes, and a mild fever but after a couple of weeks, the symptoms become more severe. People have violent, rapid fits of coughing that may be followed by a high pitched whoop, giving the disease the name whooping cough. To view video clips of children suffering from pertussis, visit www.vaccineinformation.org/video/pertussis.asp.

Adults and teens typically have milder symptoms but can have a cough for as long as 10 weeks, be hospitalized for pneumonia, and/or miss weeks of work or school.

Pertussis can be serious, especially for infants. Infants are at greatest risk for complications and can have convulsions, brain hemorrhages, and pneumonia. Symptoms can become severe quickly and infants can become seriously ill or die without much warning. To date, in 2010, four infants in Los Angeles County have died of pertussis and many more infants, children and adults have been hospitalized.

Early treatment is important. Because pertussis can only be treated with antibiotics within 3-4 weeks of symptom onset, it is important that people who may have pertussis seek care immediately.

Vaccination is the best way to prevent pertussis. Pertussis vaccines are recommended for infants, children, teens, and adults, including pregnant and breastfeeding women.

· Diphtheria, Tetanus, and acellular Pertussis (DTaP)vaccine is routinely recommended for children at 2, 4 and 6 months of age, at 15 -18 months of age and at 4 -6 years of age.

· Tetanus, Diphtheria, and acellular Pertussis (Tdap) vaccine is routinely recommended for pre-teens at 11-12 years of age and to replace one dose of Tetanus/Diphtheria (Td) vaccine for adults through 64 years of age who have not received a previous dose.

Vaccination of pregnant and postpartum women and other infant contacts is critical. A recent study suggests that 38% of infants with pertussis were infected by their mother, 17% by their father and 41% by a sibling. To prevent the spread of pertussis to infants, it is especially important to vaccinate infant contacts, including pregnant women. Women who were not vaccinated during pregnancy should be vaccinated immediately post-partum, before hospital discharge.

Please refer clients to their regular health care provider's office to get vaccinated! Those without access to a regular health care provider and/or health insurance may visit www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip or dial 2-1-1 for a list of no-cost and low-cost vaccination providers.

Prevention Matters!

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For pertussis information and educational materials, visit www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip or <http://www.eziz.org/> .

Hear stories of families impacted by pertussis at <http://www.shotbyshot.org/>