



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH & WELFARE

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Alarming increase of Idaho whooping cough cases prompts public health officials to urge pregnant women, parents of small children to get vaccinated

Nearly twice as many cases of whooping cough have been reported in Idaho so far this year, compared to 2012 and 2013's already troubling case rates. Idaho public health officials are concerned about this significant increase over the past three years, especially now that the 2014-2015 school year will be starting in Idaho communities in the next few weeks.

"The best way to protect children and infants from pertussis is to get vaccinated so you are protected, and then you drastically reduce the risk of passing it on to extremely vulnerable infants," said Mitch Scoggins, program manager for the Idaho Immunization Program. "Pregnant women, and those who come in contact with young children, including their siblings and other family members, should get vaccinated."

During January through July of this year, 241 cases of whooping cough, also known as pertussis, have been reported to public health officials, compared with 122 cases reported during the same time last year and 129 in 2012. It's particularly dangerous for babies. One Idaho infant has died this year because of pertussis.

Rates of pertussis this year are highest among Idaho children ages 5 to 17. These children and adolescents can unknowingly spread the infection to their younger siblings, relatives, and contacts in daycares and schools.

The best prevention for pertussis is vaccination. In Idaho, vaccination coverage rates are among the lowest in the country. "Whooping cough can be life-threatening for small children and infants," Scoggins said. "About half of babies younger than a year old who get the disease need hospitalization. To protect them,

their family members and others who have contact with them need to get vaccinated so they don't pass the disease along."

About 1 in 20 infants with pertussis get pneumonia. About 1 in 100 infants will have convulsions. In rare cases, pertussis can be deadly, especially in infants younger than a year old. Many infants who get pertussis are infected by coughing siblings, parents, or other caregivers who might not know they have the disease.

Pertussis vaccines (DTaP for infants/children and Tdap for adolescents/adults) are available in many physicians' offices, local public health district offices, and pharmacies. Babies should receive their first dose of DTaP during their doctor visit at two months of age, with additional doses at the 4, 6, and 15-18 month visits. The fifth and final DTaP dose is administered at 4 to 6 years of age, just before the child enters school.

Adolescents' immune systems should be boosted with a dose of Tdap during their doctor visit when they are 11 or 12 years old, at the same time they are getting their vaccines against meningitis and human papilloma virus. Anyone older than 12 who hasn't had a Tdap vaccine should get one immediately.

Pregnant women should talk to their doctors about receiving a Tdap vaccination during pregnancy because the mother can pass some protection against whooping cough along to the baby to help protect him until he's 2 months old and able to be vaccinated.

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