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Whooping Cough Update: Cases in LA County Continue to Grow Studies show pertussis spreads most frequently through families; if you live with an infant make sure you have been vaccinated

LOS ANGELES – Those who live with or care for an infant need make sure that they have received a vaccination against pertussis (whooping cough) to avoid inadvertently infecting them, the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health reminded residents today. The number of pertussis cases reported in LA County is continuing to rise, and the county’s youngest residents remain most vulnerable to the illness, which causes intense coughing and vomiting related to coughing, and could lead to pneumonia and seizures.

This year, 148 suspected cases have been reported in LA County, of which 70 have been lab-confirmed so far or meet the clinical case definition for pertussis.

“Infants under one year of age are at highest risk for developing severe, even fatal complications. However, these vulnerable residents are not eligible for vaccination against whooping cough due to their age,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “Therefore, it is up to those that live with or care for an infant to ensure that they themselves are protected against pertussis. Parents, grandparents, older siblings, day care workers, and other caregivers who have whooping cough are most likely to pass on their infection to an infant. It is important that those who are eligible for the pertussis vaccine immediately seek out vaccine.”

According to a recent study, 41 percent of infants infected with pertussis contracted the disease from a sibling, 38 percent from their mother, and 17 percent from their father. As such, anyone who has frequent contact with an infant is urged to make sure that their vaccinations are up-to-date. In addition, anyone with a cough-illness of any kind should avoid contact with infants.

“We are on track to exceed last year’s countywide total of 155 pertussis cases,” Dr. Fielding said. “Two infants have already died this year due to pertussis, which is a serious concern. This disease is vaccine-preventable, and it is up to those who are able to get the vaccine to become the first line of defense against whooping cough.” In an average year, Los Angeles County has one or no deaths attributable to pertussis.

Pertussis is spread by the coughing of an infected individual. Typical symptoms in young children include intense coughing accompanied by a whooping sound, and post-cough vomiting. Complications can include pneumonia and seizures. Among older children and adults, the primary symptom may be a cough that often lasts for several weeks or longer. If you suspect that you or a loved one may have pertussis, contact your doctor right away.



Children should receive three primary vaccinations containing the pertussis vaccine and two boosters by age four to six, followed by a Tdap booster (which protects against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis) during their preteen years. Any teen or adult who has not received a Tdap booster yet should do so, particularly if they live in a household with an infant. Los Angeles County residents are encouraged to contact their regular healthcare provider to arrange for recommended vaccinations.

Everyone should also practice standard hygiene habits in order to help prevent the spread of any illness. These healthy habits include washing your hands often with soap and water, staying home from work or school when sick, avoiding touching your eyes, nose and mouth, and covering coughs and sneezes appropriately with a tissue.

Those who do not have a regular healthcare provider or insurance coverage for vaccines may dial 2-1-1 or visit www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/ip for referrals to providers and community sites offering immunizations free or at a reduced-charge.

For more information on preventing the spread of whooping cough or other illnesses, visit the Public Health website at <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>.

The Department of Public Health is committed to protecting and improving the health of the nearly 10 million residents of Los Angeles County. Through a variety of programs, community partnerships and services, Public Health oversees environmental health, disease control, and community and family health. Public Health comprises more than 4,000 employees and has an annual budget exceeding \$750 million. To learn more about Public Health and the work we do, please visit <http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov>, visit our YouTube channel at <http://www.youtube.com/lapublichealth>, or follow us on Twitter: LAPublicHealth.

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