



For Immediate Release:

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Pertussis claims a third life in Los Angeles County

State has released new, broader vaccination recommendations

LOS ANGELES – The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health today reported the third death due to pertussis countywide so far this year. The announcement comes as the California Department of Public Health has expanded its vaccination recommendations amid rising numbers of pertussis, also known as whooping cough, cases throughout the state.

In addition to the usual series of childhood pertussis vaccinations, the California Department of Public Health **now** recommends an adolescent-adult pertussis booster vaccine (Tdap) for:

- anyone 7 years and older who is not fully immunized, including those who are more than 64 years old,
- women of childbearing age, before, during, or immediately after pregnancy

“This expanded set of recommendations is an appropriate response to the epidemic in Los Angeles County and statewide,” said Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, Director of Public Health and Health Officer. “Vaccination is our best defense against pertussis. This is a disease that is especially dangerous for infants under six months of age, who are not old enough to have received the number of vaccine doses needed to be protected against whooping cough.”

This year, 289 possible cases have been reported in LA County, of which 184 are laboratory confirmed, probable, or suspected. For all of 2009, the corresponding number of cases was 156. It has claimed three lives, all of whom were infants, in LA County. In an average year, LA County has 0 - 1 deaths attributable to pertussis.

“Infants are most likely to be infected by parents, grandparents, older siblings, day care workers, and other caregivers who have whooping cough but often don’t know that this disease is the reason for their symptoms,” said Dr. Fielding. “People suffering from a cough illness who have contact with infants should seek medical care immediately. Anyone who lives with or has frequent contact with an infant should ensure that their vaccinations are up-to-date.”

According to one recent study, when the source of the infant’s infection could be identified, 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.

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. However, some infants infected with pertussis may not show typical symptoms, but can still



suffer life-threatening complications, which 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 are in contact 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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