

Whooping cough vaccine is needed for adults to prevent illness in youngsters

November 5 2010, By Katie Pence



Adult pertussis vaccination

For most people, the giggle of an infant is one of the purest, sweetest sounds the ear has ever heard.

But the hacking cough of pertussis—as heard on the March of Dimes commercial, raising awareness for the "Sounds of Pertussis" campaign—is anything but sweet.

And what's even more alarming is that 80 percent of the time, an infant contracts the illness that causes that hacking, more commonly known as [whooping cough](#), from a family member.

Fifty percent of the time, infants get it from their parents.

UC Health family and community physicians say this number can be decreased greatly by not only getting your little one vaccinated but by also doing so yourself.

Whooping cough is a highly contagious bacterial disease that causes uncontrollable, violent coughing. It can be fatal for infants.

"The tetanus shot given to children and infants includes vaccination against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis," says Shannon Bolon, MD, a UC Health family medicine physician who sees patients at the Wyoming Family Practice Center. "Infection monitoring revealed that the cases were increasing significantly, despite appropriate administration of the vaccine to children.

"It was found that [adults](#) were harboring the infection and exposing children to it."

Bolon says that as a result in 2005, the pertussis vaccination was added to the adult tetanus vaccine.

"Adolescents and adults should receive this form of the tetanus vaccine, known as Tdap, instead of the traditional form of the tetanus booster, known as Td, one time," she says. "Td should be administered to all adults every 10 years. Adults over age 65 should get the Tdap once again."

But she adds that not everyone is staying up-to-date on their vaccinations, which could be bad news for the little ones in your life.

"Adults are often exposed to whooping cough, but an adult's airways are so much larger in diameter that the swelling and mucus that result from the illness don't affect them the same; it often just presents as a bad cough or cold," she says. "In infants, the swelling and mucus production impairs their ability to breathe, which could cause suffocation and death."

Bolon says whooping cough can be treated with antibiotics and could

potentially be gone in five to 14 days when proper action is taken but that a pertussis test is not always ordered and a proper diagnosis is not always made.

Before the problem strikes, she says, there is an easy remedy.

"Everyone needs to get their booster shot every 10 years to decrease the prevalence of pertussis in adults and the incidence of spreading the illness to children," she says. "This isn't just a warning for parents—it's for anyone who comes into contact with children, which is the majority of the general population.

"It's our public duty."

She adds that as cold and flu season approaches, adults should make it a priority to get their flu vaccine as well.

"Some people put off getting their flu shot because they say they simply never get sick," she says. "However, the illness could still be carried to others through them.

"Taking the proper precaution is all part of being a responsible citizen and maintaining not only our health but also the health of those around us."

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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