

Nurses play critical role in responding to global resurgence of pertussis

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Concerted effort is needed to reverse the ongoing rise in pertussis cases and deaths, especially among children and young people, according to the article by Emily Peake, APRN, MSN, FNP-C, CLC, and Lisa K. McGuire, MSN, MBA-HCM, RN. "This effort begins with nurses and nurse practitioners and other primary care providers who educate patients and the public," they write. "The battle of pertussis is winnable through education, awareness, and vaccination."

In US and Abroad, Rising Rates of Pertussis Infection and Death

Caused by infection with *Bordetella pertussis* bacteria, [pertussis](#) has been increasing in recent years. In the United States, average annual pertussis cases increased from less than 3,000 cases per year during the 1980s to 48,000 in 2012, including 20 deaths. Worldwide, there are an estimated 50 million cases of pertussis and 300,000 deaths. Pertussis is a major cause of death in infants worldwide.

Why is pertussis on the rise? "Ambivalence toward precautionary childhood vaccinations" is a key reason, along with the lack of well-child visits and appropriate boosters. The arrival of non-vaccinated immigrants may also be linked to new clusters of pertussis outbreaks, according to Peake and McGuire. They write, "Nurses should educate patients and the public that follow-up booster vaccinations at all ages are critical to maintain immunity to pertussis and other vaccine-preventable

diseases."

Issues including vaccine availability and cost, literacy and language barriers, and lack of information all contribute to the lack of recommended vaccinations. Fear of vaccination and religious objections also play a role. Most states allow exemptions from vaccination based on religious reasons, and there's evidence that even non-religious parents are using these exemptions to avoid vaccinating their children.

Nurses should reassure parents that that recommended vaccines are safe. Current diphtheria-tetanus-pertussis vaccines do not contain the mercury-containing preservative thimerosal. Adverse events occur in only a small fraction of vaccinated children, and most of these are mild local reactions.

Education Is Key to Increasing Pertussis Vaccination

"Practitioners must build a trusting relationship with patients and reinforce the need for vaccinations through face-to-face contact, engaging parents to discuss concerns, and provide evidence-based research to guide recommendations and reassure patients of the safety of vaccines," Peake and McGuire write. Waiting rooms provide a good opportunity to present videos and other educational materials.

The World Health Organization is working to increase the percentage of infants who receive at least three doses of [pertussis vaccine](#) to 90 percent or higher, especially in developing countries. The authors discuss some international efforts to fight pertussis and other vaccine-preventable diseases, such as the United Nations Foundation's

Shot@Life campaign.

Closer to home, partnerships should be formed with service organizations, food banks, churches, hospitals and schools. "These groups can help identify those most likely not to be vaccinated and help them find free or low cost immunizations," the authors write. "Faith community nurses are in an ideal role to create and lead these partnerships."

Nurses can also advocate for policies aimed at making universal vaccinations available for adolescents and adults. Peake and McGuire conclude, "By using our resources and uniting, a global battle will be waged and won against pertussis and the children of tomorrow can breathe easier for a lifetime."

Provided by Wolters Kluwer Health

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