

Whooping cough vaccine recommended for pregnant women amid spike in cases

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Expectant moms should be vaccinated for pertussis, or whooping cough, during their third trimester, according to obstetricians at Loyola University Health System. Those in close contact with the infant also should be up to date with their whooping cough vaccine.

This recommendation comes on the heels of a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report, which found a 30 percent increase in whooping cough cases (17,325) from January to mid-August this year as compared with the same period last year.

"This spike in whooping cough may be due to the fact that the vaccine does not protect against the disease for long and parents who don't vaccinate their children may be creating more opportunities for whooping cough outbreaks," said Sarah Wagner, MD, an obstetrician and gynecologist at Loyola University Health System.

Whooping cough is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by bacteria. This disease initially resembles a cold and progresses to uncontrollable, violent coughing, which often makes it hard to breathe. Whooping cough most commonly affects infants and young children and can be life-threatening, especially in babies who are younger than 1.

The CDC and the American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists recommend that women receive the vaccination sometime between weeks 27 and 36 of pregnancy. After receiving a whooping cough vaccine, the body creates protective antibodies to help fight the

disease in mothers and infants. These antibodies provide the baby with some short-term protection against whooping cough before the infant can be vaccinated. The vaccine is most effective two weeks after it is administered, so giving the shot late in pregnancy gives babies the best protection at birth. A baby does not receive the first whooping cough vaccine until two months of age.

The childhood vaccine is called DTaP. The whooping cough booster vaccine for adolescents and adults is called Tdap. Both DTaP and Tdap protect against whooping cough, tetanus and diphtheria.

"There are currently no whooping cough vaccines recommended for newborns at birth, so we recommend that all of our pregnant patients and those around the baby get the vaccination," said Dr. Wagner, who also is an assistant professor at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine. "The vaccination is the best way to prevent whooping cough in the baby and reduces the risk of infant hospitalizations and deaths from this disease."

Dr. Wagner recommends that women get vaccinated during each subsequent pregnancy as well. The amount of [whooping cough](#) antibodies in the body decreases over time. When women get the vaccine during one pregnancy, their antibody levels may not stay high enough to ensure enough protection for future pregnancies.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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