



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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First Confirmed Whooping Cough Death in a California Infant Since 2016

State Public Health Officer Urges Pregnant Women to get Immunized

SACRAMENTO – The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) announced today that pertussis, better known as whooping cough, claimed the life of a San Bernardino County infant. This is the first confirmed infant death from the disease since 2016, when two deaths occurred.

“This baby’s death is a tragedy for the family and for California as a community, as this is a preventable disease,” said Dr. Karen Smith, CDPH Director and State Public Health Officer. “This serves as a grim reminder that whooping cough is always present in our communities, and immunizations are the first line of defense.”

Each year, 50-200 California infants are hospitalized with pertussis. CDPH and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that expectant mothers receive the whooping cough booster shot (also called Tdap, or tetanus, diphtheria and acellular pertussis vaccine) at the earliest opportunity between 27 and 36 weeks of every pregnancy, even if previously immunized. Getting immunized during pregnancy boosts a mother’s immunity and passes on protective antibodies directly to their babies before birth. This helps protect newborns until they are old enough to begin receiving their own whooping cough immunizations at 6 to 8 weeks of age.

“No baby should have to be hospitalized due to a vaccine-preventable disease, and certainly no baby should die,” said Dr. Smith. “To give babies the best protection, I urge all pregnant women to get vaccinated against whooping cough as early as possible during the third trimester of every pregnancy.”

To avoid the spread of whooping cough, CDPH also recommends that:

- Parents immunize their babies against whooping cough as soon as possible. The first dose is recommended at two months of age, but can be given as early as six weeks of age.
- California 7th grade students receive the whooping cough booster, Tdap.
- Adults receive a whooping cough booster once in their lives.

The symptoms of whooping cough vary by age. For children, whooping cough typically starts with a runny nose and cough for one to two weeks. The cough then worsens and often results in rapid coughing spells that end with a whooping sound. Young infants may not have typical whooping cough symptoms and may have no apparent cough. Parents may describe episodes in which breathing briefly stops and the infant's face turns red or purple. For adults, whooping cough may be a cough illness that lasts for several weeks.

Most health plans cover Tdap immunizations, and many pharmacies offer it. Medi-Cal members may be able to get their Tdap shots at the pharmacy where they usually pick up their prescriptions. Call your health plan to learn more. If you do not have health insurance, call your [local health department](#) to find a low- or no-cost location.

More [information about pertussis](#) is available on CDPH's website.

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