

Protect Your Babies by Getting YOURSELF Vaccinated Against Influenza and Pertussis! By Kaye Ivanoff, RN

One of the best ways to protect your babies from the flu is to get YOURSELF vaccinated! Cold and flu season keeps us all indoors more and that is one reason that the number of cases of influenza increases drastically in the fall and winter. Cold and flu season also means an increase in the number of cases of Pertussis, commonly known as whooping cough, in both children and adults. Pertussis is a very contagious disease caused by a type of bacteria called *Bordetella pertussis* and can cause serious illness, even death, especially in infants too young to be fully vaccinated.

The disease starts like the common cold, with runny nose or congestion, sneezing, and maybe mild cough or fever. But after one or two weeks, you may develop a severe cough, followed by a series of coughing fits that continues for weeks. The “whooping” sound is caused by violent and rapid coughing, over and over, until the air is gone from the lungs and you are forced to inhale with a loud “whooping” sound. In infants, the cough can be very mild or none at all, but they can stop breathing for a period of time, a serious condition known as “apnea.” Children with apnea must be taken immediately to a hospital Emergency Room for evaluation and treatment.

Pertussis is most severe for babies; more than half of infants younger than 1 year of age who get the disease must be hospitalized. About 1 in 5 infants with pertussis get pneumonia (lung infection), and about 1 in 100 will have convulsions. In rare cases (1 in 100), pertussis can be deadly, especially in infants.

Pertussis is usually spread by coughing or sneezing while in close contact with others, who then breathe in the pertussis bacteria. Because we all carry Pertussis in our nasal passages, many infants who get pertussis are infected by parents, older siblings, or other caregivers who might not even know they have the disease. That is why it is important for everyone who is around infants to get vaccinated against pertussis themselves, so they do not give the bacteria to unprotected babies. Even if they were completely vaccinated as children, adolescents and adults need to be revaccinated because protection from the childhood vaccine fades over time. Parents can also help protect infants by keeping them away as much as possible from anyone who has cold symptoms or is coughing.

Parents must make sure children get their recommended five shots against Pertussis when they are supposed to get them. The following sections outline the CDC recommendations for Pertussis vaccine for various age groups:

For Infants and Children: In the United States, the recommended pertussis vaccine for children is called DTaP. This is a safe and effective combination vaccine that protects children against three diseases: diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis. For maximum protection against pertussis, children need five DTaP shots. The first three shots are given at 2, 4, and 6 months of age. The fourth shot is given between 15 and 18 months of age, and a fifth shot is given when a child enters school, at 4–6 years of age. If a 7-10 year old is not up-to-date with DTaP vaccines, a dose of Tdap should be given before the 11-12 year old check-up.

For Pre-teens and Adolescents: Vaccine protection for pertussis, tetanus, and diphtheria can fade with time. Pre-teens going to the doctor for their regular check-up at age 11 or 12 years should get a booster

vaccine, called Tdap. Teens and young adults who **didn't** get a booster as a pre-teen should get one dose when they visit their health care provider.

For Adults: Adults who didn't get Tdap as a pre-teen or teen should get one dose of Tdap. Most pregnant women who were not previously vaccinated with Tdap should get one dose of Tdap vaccine any time after five months of pregnancy. Getting vaccinated with Tdap is especially important for families with and caregivers of infants. Adults 65 years and older who have close contact with infants should get a dose of Tdap, following the newest vaccine recommendations.

The easiest thing for adults to do is to get Tdap instead of their next regular tetanus booster—the Td shot that is recommended for adults every 10 years. The dose of Tdap can be given earlier than the 10-year mark, so it's a good idea that if you have not had a dose of Tdap in the past, you should take one now.

The best way to prevent Pertussis is with vaccination. Avoiding people with a cold is also important for people of all ages. Knowing the signs and symptoms of Pertussis is very important in helping your doctor take good care of you. When you or your child develops a cold that includes a prolonged or severe cough, it may be pertussis. The best way to know for sure is to see your doctor as soon as possible.

Some of the above information was compiled from information found at www.cdc.gov.

This article was written by Kaye Ivanoff, RN of SHOTS, etc., a Nashville-based provider of all vaccinations needed by adolescents and adults to stay healthy for work or school requirements, world travel and everyday life. For more information about services available for companies and individuals, please call 615-469-7413 or visit www.SHOTSetc.com. SHOTS, etc. is located at 7648 Hwy 70 So. Ste 15, Nashville, TN 37221.

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