



Health Tips for Parents

MATTEL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL UCLA

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Who needs the pertussis vaccination?

California is experiencing its worst outbreak of pertussis, also known as whooping cough, in 50 years. Parents should talk to their doctors about who in the family needs to be vaccinated.



Pertussis is a bacterial infection of the respiratory system, which includes the lungs and breathing tubes. Whooping cough is highly contagious and can spread from person to person through tiny drops of fluid from an infected person's nose or mouth. Whooping cough gets its name from the "whooping" sound infected children would make while trying to catch a breath in between coughing spells.



With the current epidemic of pertussis, UCLA pediatric infectious disease specialist James Cherry, M.D., stresses the importance of vaccination for adolescents and adults — especially those in close contact with newborns — and the need for more vigilance in detection.

Vaccination Today, kids receive a series of the pertussis-containing vaccine, called DTaP (Diphtheria, Tetanus and Pertussis), which is routinely given in five doses before a child's

seventh birthday and then followed by a recently recommended booster shot of the Tdap vaccine between the ages of 11 to 12 years.

If a doctor thinks a child might have whooping cough, he or she may take a sample of mucus from the back of the child's nose (nasopharynx) to be tested for the pertussis bacteria and may order further blood tests and a chest X-ray. A child who has whooping cough will need plenty of fluids to drink and specific antibiotics.

"Vaccination for adolescents and adults, especially those in close contact with newborns, is crucial," advises Dr. Cherry. "Infants can't get their first vaccination until they are at least six weeks old, and they do not have adequate protection until about seven months of age after they have received three doses of the vaccine. Pertussis in the first three months of life tends to be particularly severe and can be fatal and nearly always requires hospitalization in a hospital with a pediatric intensive care unit."

Symptoms of whooping cough:

- Sneezing
- Runny nose
- Minimal or no fever
- Coughing that usually worsens over a two to four week period
- "Whooping" sound when taking a breath
- Vomiting following a cough episode
- Child often turns red or purple when coughing



Getting the Proper Care

In addition to making sure their child gets the proper care, parents should be vigilant about making sure their child does not spread it to other children. "It is also important that physicians do a better job of recognizing and treating pertussis," says Dr. Cherry, "and that everyone (children, adolescents and adults) gets vaccinated."

This information is provided courtesy of the pediatricians at Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA. UCLA Health System pediatricians are conveniently located in your neighborhood. In addition to our Children's Health Center in Westwood, we have offices in Brentwood, Manhattan Beach, Santa Monica and West Los Angeles. All health and health-related information contained in this publication is intended to be general in nature and should not be used as a substitute for a visit with a healthcare professional.