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How to Prevent Whooping Cough in Oklahoma Children

Recent reports about whooping cough (pertussis) in northeast Oklahoma have raised concerns about how to protect children, especially babies, from the disease. Whooping cough is a serious disease that can affect people of any age, but infants are at greatest risk.

“The best way to prevent whooping cough in children and babies younger than 12 months of age is to surround the child with persons who have been vaccinated against the disease,” said Ottawa County Health Department Administrative Director Maria Alexander. “In other words, make sure all of the people in contact with the child or baby have received a dose of Tdap or DTaP vaccine according to the recommended schedule.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states parents, brothers, sisters, and others living in the same household are the source for 75 percent to 83 percent of whooping cough cases in infants under age 1. Grandparents are the source for six to eight percent of whooping cough cases in babies. All persons who have or will have contact with babies should be vaccinated against whooping cough including:

- All children at 2, 4, 6, and 12 to 18 months of age and at 4 to 6 years of age
- Pregnant women past 20 weeks gestation
- Women not vaccinated during pregnancy should receive Tdap immediately post-partum
- Child care workers
- Health care personnel, including anyone employed in clinics or hospitals
- All family members and relatives

DTaP vaccine (diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccine) is used for children 6 years of age and younger. Tdap vaccine is a combination vaccine that provides a booster dose of pertussis along with the tetanus and diphtheria booster (Td), because immunity decreases with time. Tdap vaccine is recommended for all children over 6 years of age not complete with DTaP series, teens beginning at 11 years of age, and adults. If an adult or teen has not received a dose of Tdap previously they should receive a dose at least two weeks before they anticipate having contact with a baby.

All students entering seventh grade are required to have one dose of Tdap before the start of the school year. The Ottawa County Health Department urges parents of sixth graders to seek vaccination for their children now, rather than waiting for the July and August back-to-school rush.

“The more people are immunized with the Tdap vaccine, the lower the risk of exposure to whooping cough for infants and children in Ottawa County,” Alexander emphasized.

The Ottawa County Health Department has Tdap or DTaP vaccine available for all ages. For more information, contact the Ottawa County Health Department at (918) 540-2481.

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