

State Buys More Vaccination as Whooping Cough Epidemic Continues

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - More than 2,000 new cases of whooping cough have been reported since the secretary of health declared an epidemic April 3. The epidemic is up to 2,883 reported cases and remains active; state health officials urge vaccination and other disease prevention measures. "Infants are most at risk for very serious illness from whooping cough, and many are made sick by an adult who didn't know they were carrying the illness," explains State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes. "All teens and adults should get the Tdap shot. Even people who don't have close contact with babies can spread the illness to babies when they're in public." The Department of Health ordered 14,000 more doses of whooping cough vaccine for uninsured adults to go with 27,000 doses already sent to local health and tribal partners. A state health vaccination promotion campaign includes radio, TV, billboard, and bus ads around Washington. Getting vaccinated helps protect the person who gets immunized while protecting others from disease, including infants who most often catch the illness from a relative.

Babies under two months are too young to get vaccinated and are at high risk for serious illness. This year there have been 173 reported whooping cough cases in infants; 38 of them were hospitalized. No deaths have been reported. Protection provided by the childhood whooping cough vaccine series wears off over time, so teens and adults need a booster. People whose vaccine protection wears off may get whooping cough, yet usually have less severe symptoms, shorter illnesses, and are less likely to spread the disease to others. Adults who aren't sure if they've had the Tdap booster should check with their health care provider. While vaccination is the best protection, there are other effective ways to reduce the spread of pertussis. It's important for anyone with a cough to stay home when they're sick, wash their hands often, and go to the doctor for a prolonged cough. People diagnosed with whooping cough should stay away from babies, and stay home from work, school, and other activities until they've finished five days of antibiotics or until at least three weeks after the cough started. Because pertussis in its early stages appears similar to a common cold, it's often not suspected or diagnosed until the more severe symptoms appear. Infected people are most contagious during this time, up to about 2 weeks after the cough begins. Anyone who has been in close contact with someone known to have whooping cough should talk to their health care provider. Uninsured adults can contact their local health agency to find out where state-supplied vaccine is available. Health care providers can charge up to about \$15 to give the vaccine, but this fee can be waived for those who can't afford it. Most health insurance plans cover whooping cough vaccine for adults and the state provides all vaccine for Washington children younger than 19 years old through the Childhood Vaccine Program. The state has now purchased 41,000 total doses of Tdap for adults for local health agencies and tribes to use in their communities.