



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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NINTH CALIFORNIA BABY DIES FROM WHOOPING COUGH

SACRAMENTO – California’s epidemic of pertussis (whooping cough) has claimed the life of a San Bernardino county infant, the ninth baby to die from the disease this year, Dr. Mark Horton, director of the California Department of Public Health, announced today.

“This baby’s death is a tragedy for a family and a painful reminder for all of us that vaccine-preventable diseases like pertussis are still with us,” Horton said. “We have an effective vaccine to prevent pertussis. We need the help of the entire community to combat this epidemic and particularly to ensure the protection of young infants.”

As of Sept. 14, California had recorded more illnesses due to pertussis – 4,017 –than in any year since 1955, when the disease caused 4,949 illnesses. The number of pertussis illnesses this year is the highest since state law mandated pertussis vaccination for kindergarten students in 1977.

All of the infants who have died were under three months of age. The five-dose series of pertussis vaccinations typically starts at two months of age, but adequate protection doesn’t occur until the third dose at about six months of age. Horton urged parents, family members and caregivers of infants to get a pertussis booster shot and provide a “cocoon of protection” around the newborns.

In response to the pertussis epidemic, CDPH is distributing free pertussis vaccine to birthing hospitals, community health centers, Native American health centers and local health departments. In addition, CDPH has broadened its recommendations for pertussis vaccination to include a booster shot for:

- Anyone seven years and older who is not fully immunized, including seniors;
- Women of childbearing age, before, during or immediately after pregnancy;
- Others who have contact with pregnant women or infants.

For those ages 65 and older, the newly recommended pertussis booster shot is a covered benefit for Medicare beneficiaries under the Medicare Part D plan, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.



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