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NEWS RELEASE

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PERTUSSIS OUTBREAK

HANFORD - Kings County is experiencing an outbreak of whooping cough, also known as pertussis. In the last six months, six children have been hospitalized. One child was two. The rest were under six months of age. The disease in older children and adults presents several diagnostic challenges and is infrequently diagnosed. The cases were widely spread throughout the community. These six cases present strong evidence that there is widespread transmission in our community. While these six children have done well, whooping cough in infants is a serious disease that occasionally causes death. 84% of the deaths in the United States due to whooping cough occur in infants less than three months old.

In adolescents and adults the disease is pretty unremarkable except for the cough. Typically the cough follows a one week cold-like illness. The cough occurs in clusters lasting minutes. The coughing can be quite violent and is sometimes associated with vomiting, loss of bladder control and rib fractures. Slowly the cough improves but can persist for 6 weeks or more. The infectious period, when the victim can transmit the disease, can last up to three weeks. Infants are typically infected by the adolescents and adults in their family or daycare circle.

We can prevent whooping cough with vaccination. Prior to the introduction of a vaccine in the 1940s, there were around 175,000 cases of whooping cough reported a year in the U.S. The vaccine is effective but its protection tends to wane over time, in about 6-8 years. The disease itself doesn't confer life-long immunity. Infants can't be vaccinated until they are 2 months old. They should receive second and third doses at four months and six months. They probably aren't fully protected until they are about one year old.

Besides seeing that infants complete the vaccination schedule on time, we protect infants by protecting them from people who might have whooping cough. Infants should be kept at least three feet away from anyone who has a cold or a suspicious cough. The one exception is the infant's nursing mother. The other strategy is to vaccinate the circle of family members and other care providers.

All children should complete a six dose schedule, 2 months, 4 months, 6 months, 15 months, 4-6 years and 11-12 years. All the recommended preadolescent doses of vaccines are frequently missed. All adults less than 64 years old should receive one dose of vaccine for pertussis (whooping cough). Ideally this recommended vaccine would be explored as part of a preconception plan. Although not contraindicated, vaccination of pregnant women is generally not recommended and vaccination should be offered to the new mother at her first visit after delivery. Families with infants and those with expected newborns should review their vaccination needs with their primary care provider or with the health department. Nonfamily care providers should consider being vaccinated for whooping cough. The vaccine is quite inexpensive.