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NEWS RELEASE

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Whooping Cough on the Rise in Idaho and U.S.

More cases of whooping cough, also known as pertussis, have been reported in Idaho this year at the same time a pertussis epidemic in California has caused 6 infant deaths in that state. These events have prompted concern in Idaho health officials, causing them to urge people to make sure their families are up-to-date on vaccinations against this disease.

In the first 6 months of this year, 77 Idaho cases have been reported to public health officials compared with 45 cases reported during the same timeframe last year. The best prevention for pertussis is vaccination, and in Idaho, vaccination coverage rates are among the lowest in the country. In addition, pertussis is most severe for babies.

"We urge parents, household members, and other caregivers to get vaccinated against this disease, to protect babies," said Dr. Christine Hahn, State Epidemiologist. "We know that in many cases, it's the mom, dad, grandparent, or sibling that infects the babies that end up getting so sick. Vaccination of the rest of us remains the best way to protect the most vulnerable persons in our population, who are too young to be fully protected by their immunizations."

About 1 in 20 infants with pertussis get pneumonia (lung infection). About 1 in 100 infants will have convulsions. In rare cases, pertussis can be deadly, especially in infants less than 1 year of age. Many infants who get pertussis are infected by older siblings, parents, or other caregivers who might not know they have the disease.

Pertussis vaccines (*DTaP* for infants/children and *Tdap* for adolescents/adults) are available in many physicians' offices. Since 2005, there has been an adolescent/adult pertussis booster vaccine (Tdap) that can be used for prevention and control of pertussis. The protection received from DTaP, the childhood vaccine, fades over time. Adolescents and adults need the Tdap booster.

(more)

Pertussis recommendations for vaccination include:

- The DTaP vaccine should be given to infants and children at 2, 4, and 6 months of age. A fourth dose is given between 15 and 18 months of age, and a fifth dose is given when a child enters school, at 4–6 years of age. To maximize protection, all 5 doses of DTaP are needed on time according to the recommended immunization schedule.
- Pre-teens going to the doctor for their regular check-up at age 11 or 12 years should get a dose of Tdap.
- Adults 19-64 years old who didn't get Tdap as a pre-teen or teen should get one dose of Tdap in place of their next Tetanus booster.
- Those who are planning on becoming pregnant or are currently pregnant should talk to their doctor about getting the Tdap vaccine to avoid spreading this disease to their baby.

All people around infants should be vaccinated with Tdap including siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles, nannies, caregivers, childcare staff, etc. Keep young infants away from people with cough illness. Likewise, people with cough illness should always stay away from young infants.

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(Editors: For more information please contact Health and Welfare's Emily Simnitt, 334-0693, or your District Health Department Public Information Officer.)