



STATE OF WASHINGTON  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

April 14, 2015

Dear Colleague:

Pertussis continually circulates in our communities, with peaks in disease every few years. In 2012, Washington had an epidemic with nearly 5,000 cases. Now, pertussis is definitely on the rise again. So far this year there have been 319 reported cases of pertussis compared to 49 during the same time last year. The age groups being affected most at present are school age children and teens. However, those most at risk for severe disease are infants, and the rate in babies is also increasing.

Vaccinations and good respiratory etiquette are the best tools we have for preventing pertussis. Vaccinated people who do get pertussis are much less likely to be hospitalized or die from the disease. Studies have shown that protection from any of the available pertussis vaccines wears off over time. That makes it difficult to stop the spread of disease. Therefore, the focus must be on preventing severe disease, especially among infants.

It is not currently recommended for most people to get the adolescent/adult vaccine (Tdap) more than once. However, Tdap is recommended for pregnant women during the last trimester of each pregnancy because **the greatest risk for getting pertussis and suffering complications, even death, is in infants**. Recommend Tdap vaccine to your pregnant patients during every pregnancy and if you cannot provide the vaccine, please make a referral. A vaccine recommendation from a health care professional makes a huge difference. Women who are offered vaccine at the time of their visit are more likely to get vaccinated than those who are not offered vaccine.

Vaccination during each pregnancy reduces the risk of a mother with pertussis infecting the baby, and it can also provide passive protection for the baby in the first few months of life when they're the most vulnerable and too young to be vaccinated themselves. Infants that you consider to be at increased risk for exposure to pertussis can receive their first dose of DTaP as early as 6 weeks.

**Tdap Vaccine Recommendations:**

- The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends Tdap vaccination during *each* pregnancy, even for women who were previously vaccinated.
- Tdap vaccine can be administered to pregnant women between 27 and 36 weeks gestation.

- All other adults that have not already had a Tdap vaccination should receive one dose of Tdap.
- Adolescents should receive a dose of Tdap at 11-12 years of age.
- Consider stocking Tdap vaccine in your practice or refer patients to another provider, pharmacy, or other community resource.

For more information and resources on pertussis, check our [department webpages](http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/WhoopingCough) at <http://www.doh.wa.gov/YouandYourFamily/IllnessandDisease/WhoopingCough>

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Scott Lindquist".

Scott Lindquist, MD, MPH  
State Epidemiologist for Communicable Diseases  
Washington State Department of Health