



Press Release

DHHS reports North Carolina's first infant death from whooping cough in 2013

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
September 27, 2013

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Raleigh, N.C. - The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services today reported the first infant death in 2013 attributable to pertussis, commonly known as whooping cough. The child, who was three weeks old, was from Transylvania County.

"Infants cannot begin vaccination against whooping cough until they are 2 months old and even young children are not fully protected until they have finished a series of vaccinations," said Dr. Robin Cummings, Acting State Health Director and DHHS Deputy Secretary for Health Services. "That is why it is so important that anyone who lives with or will be around a baby be vaccinated to prevent transmitting the disease."

DTaP is a vaccine that helps children younger than age 7 develop immunity to diphtheria, tetanus, and whooping cough (pertussis). Tdap is a booster immunization given at age 11 or older that offers extended protection from those diseases for adolescents and adults.

As whooping cough continues to spread throughout the state, county and health officials strongly urge parents to take the following steps to protect their children and other loved ones.

- Make sure your child is current on his or her vaccinations. The DTaP vaccination series is recommended for children starting at 2 months of age, and continuing at 4 months, 6 months, 15-18 months and 4-6 years of age.
- If you are pregnant, vaccination with Tdap is needed during every pregnancy to provide some protection to your infant from pertussis until your infant is old enough to be vaccinated.
- Insist that the adults in your children's lives also are vaccinated. Babysitters, childcare providers, family members, and others who come in close contact with your children should be vaccinated.
- Do not forget booster shots. The Tdap booster shot is recommended for any child 7-10 who did not complete the childhood DTaP vaccination series, and anyone 11 and older who has not yet received a Tdap booster. All children 11-12 years of age should receive one dose of Tdap vaccine. Tdap can be administered regardless of the interval since the last tetanus and diphtheria containing vaccine. It is never too late for teenagers or adults to receive the booster if they haven't already.

"State law requires pertussis vaccinations for pre-school and school-age children, but we know that immunity wanes over the years," Dr. Cummings said. "A booster shot is a safe and effective way for adolescents and adults to protect themselves and those they love."

Pertussis vaccine is available through all state immunization providers, including private health care providers and local health departments. Some health care providers may charge an administration fee.

Whooping cough is a highly contagious illness that is spread from person to person usually by coughing or sneezing while in close contact with others.

For more information on pertussis vaccine, visit www.immunize.nc.gov/family/vaccines/pertussis.htm

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