

Rochester Immediate Care physicians warn about whooping cough: adults, too, are vulnerable

In light of the current whooping cough (pertussis) epidemic in California, which is on pace to be the largest there in decades, and increasing pertussis activity in Pennsylvania and in upstate New York (as reported by the *New York Times*), physicians at Rochester Immediate Care express concern for the residents of the Rochester area:

While whooping cough (pertussis) mostly affects infants under one year of age, it can also cause significant symptoms in toddlers and school-age children as well as adults that can last up to three months or longer if untreated. The bacteria that cause pertussis can be spread by children who did not receive their vaccines or by adults who may have received the vaccines as children but did not receive a booster and are no longer immune.

While all infants and children should be vaccinated in the regimen recommended by the Centers for Disease Control, older children and adults also must be up to date with their vaccines, both to prevent them from getting sick themselves and so they don't aid and abet the transmission of pertussis to others.

"While pertussis in infants and children remains an on-going health concern, what is emerging is a renewed concern for teenagers and adults who have let their childhood vaccinations lapse," says Rochester Immediate Care medical director Janet Williams, M.D. "This appears to be part of the problem in California and what we want to avoid in Rochester - we can't let teens and adults off the hook.

"Adults and teens who have not kept up with their booster shots leave themselves vulnerable to this highly infectious bacteria – they can catch it and suffer the serious effects of whooping cough AND they can spread it to others."

Pertussis starts like a common cold but then often progresses to intense, almost violent, fits of coughing followed by a forced gulping for air with a "whooping" sound (hence, its popular name). There is often no or only low grade fever.

Pertussis can cause pneumonia, seizures and death, particularly in infants less than four months of age. In adults, it causes a stubborn, annoying, sometimes violent cough that just doesn't go away or get better.

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Dr. Williams' immediate recommendations:

- Parents should make sure their children receive the recommended 5-dose primary vaccination series against pertussis (DTaP) at 2, 4, 6 and 15-18 months and at 4-6 years of age. This series is required of children before they enter school.
- Parents must seek medical attention immediately if their child develops a severe cough that interferes with feeding and/or sleeping and for milder coughs that don't improve after a week.
- Adolescents (ideally at age 11-12) and adults should receive a booster vaccine for pertussis.
- Anyone who has been in close contact with a known or suspected case of pertussis should seek medical care to determine if testing, antibiotic prophylaxis and/or boost vaccination is indicated.
- Adults and adolescents with severe cough or coughs lasting longer than two weeks should be evaluated by a physician.
- Practice good cough hygiene (cover your cough, wash your hands frequently, etc.).
- Adults: Stay away from infants when you are coughing.

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