



News Release

For immediate release: May 4, 2015

(15-067)

Contacts: [Marqise Allen](#), Communications Office
[Kelly Stowe](#), Communications Office

360-236-4072

360-236-4022

Whooping cough study shows vaccine protection fades over time

Vaccination still the best tool for protection

OLYMPIA — A new study shows that whooping cough vaccinations wear off over time, but they're still the best protection against the dangerous disease.

The study, released in the May edition of the journal *Pediatrics*, used data from the 2012 whooping cough epidemic in Washington. “*Tdap Vaccine Effectiveness in Adolescents During the 2012 Washington State Pertussis Epidemic*” is one of the first studies to test how long the adolescent and adult (Tdap) whooping cough vaccines are effective.

The investigation analyzed vaccine histories of 11- to 19-year-olds who contracted whooping cough during the 2012 epidemic. Researchers also looked at the vaccine histories of three adolescents that didn't have whooping cough but were the same age and went to the same doctor. While whooping cough vaccines are the best form of defense against the disease, the study found that much of the protection from the Tdap vaccine may wear off after two to four years.

State officials say the study shows that Tdap is most effective in its first year, underscoring the importance of high-risk individuals and pregnant women getting vaccinated.

“Whooping cough shots are not perfect, but they're still the best way to protect yourself, your family, and especially babies from the disease,” said Chas DeBolt, communicable disease epidemiologist for the Department of Health and one of the lead authors of the study. “The vaccine is most effective during the first year after it is given, so it's especially important that pregnant moms get the vaccine at the right time during each pregnancy so they can pass on protection to their babies.”

Almost 5,000 cases of whooping cough were reported during the 2012 epidemic, which was the worst outbreak of whooping cough in Washington since 1941. Whooping cough is on the rise

— More —

again this year. There were 387 cases reported as of April 25, compared to 85 cases reported during the same time period in 2014.

“We’re very concerned about the continued increase in reported cases, because this disease can be deadly for babies and take a toll on people of all ages,” DeBolt said. “Although vaccine protection wanes over time, vaccination remains the best tool we have to slow the spread of this serious disease. That’s why we’re asking everyone to make sure they’re up to date with their whooping cough vaccine.”

Whooping cough vaccines are recommended for all children and adults. Babies get their first dose of at two months of age and need a series of shots to get the best protection.

Everyone age 11 and older should get one dose of the whooping cough booster called Tdap. Pregnant women should get a Tdap vaccine during each pregnancy to pass protection on to their babies, helping protect them until they’re old enough to receive their own shots. People who get whooping cough after receiving the Tdap vaccine often have milder symptoms.

All recommended vaccines are offered at no cost to all kids under 19 through health care provider offices [participating in the state’s Childhood Vaccine Program](#). Health care providers may charge an office visit fee and an administration fee to give the vaccine. People who can’t afford the administration fee can ask their health care provider if they’ll waive that cost. Most health insurance carriers cover the whooping cough vaccine, but check with your health plan to be sure.

More information on preventing whooping cough is available on the [Department of Health website](#). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has a new website about [the importance of pregnant women getting vaccinated](#) against whooping cough.

The [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov) is your source for *a healthy dose of information*. Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

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