



News Release

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Whooping Cough vaccine booster recommended for adults

HEIDELBERG, Germany – Many people are unaware that the immunization they received for whooping cough as a child does not last into adulthood. To prevent the spread of this disease, The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), Public Health Command Region – Europe and Europe Regional Medical Command recommend a booster vaccine for adolescents and adults.

What is it? Pertussis, also known as whooping cough, is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*. Pertussis usually starts with cold-like symptoms, a runny nose, a mild cough, and a low-grade fever. After 1 to 2 weeks, severe coughing can begin. Coughs end with a “whoop” sound as the person gasps for breath. This extreme coughing can cause vomiting and fatigue and can last for weeks. In infants, the cough can be minimal or not even there. Infants may gag, gasp or have a symptom known as "apnea" (a pause in breathing). Pertussis is most severe in children and can even be fatal in infants. More than half of infants younger than 1 year of age who get the disease must be hospitalized.

Why is the booster important? The CDC estimates that 600,000 cases of pertussis occur every year in the United States, and the number of cases is increasing in both the U.S. and in Europe. Soldiers, civilians, and their families stationed in Europe may be at even greater risk because traveling to different countries exposes us to many people.

How can you prevent pertussis? The best way to prevent pertussis is to get vaccinated. The recommended pertussis vaccine for infants and children is called DTaP (diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis) and the series of five shots is completed by the time a child enters school. Vaccine protection for pertussis, tetanus and diphtheria wanes with time but adults can protect themselves and the children they are in close contact with by getting a booster vaccine. Adolescents and adults up to age 64 should receive a one-time booster for protection against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (Tdap), preferably at age 11-12. Pregnant women in need of the booster should receive it late in the second trimester or during the third trimester. Adolescents and adults of any age (including those 65 and older), who have close contact with an infant under 12 months old, should be vaccinated with Tdap as soon as possible.

How is pertussis treated? Pertussis is generally treated with antibiotics and early treatment is very important. Treatment may make your infection less severe if it is started early, before coughing fits begin. Treatment can also help prevent the spread of the disease. Treatment after three weeks of illness is unlikely to help because the bacteria are gone from your body, even though you usually will still have symptoms. Children, childcare workers, and healthcare workers with suspected or confirmed pertussis should stay home from work, school, or daycare for at least the first five days of antibiotic treatment.

Getting the vaccine: At your next appointment, talk to your provider about getting the vaccine. You can also see your local immunization clinic during regular duty hours or make an appointment if it is required.

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