



# News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

---

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

August 3, 2015  
PH15-053

**CONTACT:** [Anita Gore](#)  
[Orville Thomas](#)  
(916) 440-7259

**Public Health Urges Prenatal Immunization to Combat Pertussis Risk**

SACRAMENTO – California Department of Public Health (CDPH) Director and State Health Officer Dr. Karen Smith today warned parents about the continued dangers of pertussis (whooping cough). The disease has already caused one infant death and at least 126 infant hospitalizations in California this year.

“Vaccinated mothers pass protective antibodies to their infants during pregnancy,” said Dr. Smith. “Right now, it’s estimated that fewer than half of all pregnant women in California are vaccinated against whooping cough. We need to increase that number to help improve the health of our children and of our communities.”

CDPH urges expecting mothers to receive a pertussis vaccine (called Tdap because it covers tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis). Prenatal vaccination will help protect newborn children until they are old enough to receive their own vaccination against pertussis. Because immunity decreases over time, women should receive the pertussis vaccine in the last trimester of *each pregnancy*.

Pertussis continues to spread at above-normal levels in California following a major epidemic in 2014, when reported disease rates were the highest seen since the 1950’s. Disease rates and risks of hospitalization and death are highest for infants under the age of one.

Pertussis can cause a severe, persistent cough. Historically, unvaccinated children with pertussis would cough hard enough to cause vomiting or a “whooping” breath after a coughing spell.

Symptoms of pertussis vary widely by age and vaccination history. Young infants may not have typical pertussis symptoms and may not appear to cough. Instead, they may have difficulty breathing, episodes in which they stop breathing, or their faces turn purple.

CDPH is working closely with local health departments, schools, media outlets and other partners to inform providers and the public about the importance of vaccination against pertussis, especially for pregnant women during the third trimester of every pregnancy. CDPH also reminds parents that Tdap vaccination is a requirement for advancement into the 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

[Pertussis data](#), including the number of cases in each county, can be found on the CDPH website.

[www.cdph.ca.gov](http://www.cdph.ca.gov)

