

Barton urges vaccinations for whooping cough

By Denise Sloan Smart



More cases of pertussis – also known as whooping cough -- have popped up statewide this year than in the last 50 years.

Health officials across California are seeing a sharp spike in cases of pertussis and are encouraging parents, caregivers and older siblings of infants to seek vaccinations. Pertussis is especially dangerous for babies.

In El Dorado County, there have been at 23 reported cases of pertussis since the beginning of the year, compared to only three last year, according to Olivia Kasirye, El Dorado County health officer.

A total of 910 cases of pertussis have been reported statewide this year – four times as many cases as last year – along with six deaths, all among infants who were under 3 months of age.

There have been no reported deaths due to pertussis in El Dorado County this year.

Pertussis is a highly contagious respiratory tract infection, spread through coughs and sneezes. It is particularly dangerous for unimmunized and incompletely immunized infants.

“Babies are more vulnerable to pertussis because under the age of six months their lungs are not fully developed and they are prone to apnea, which means they just quit breathing,”

explained Rita Wang, physician with Barton Pediatrics.

Symptoms of pertussis typically start with a cough and runny nose for one to two weeks, followed by weeks to months of rapid coughing fits that sometimes end with a whooping sound. Fever is rare.

Parents and caregivers of infants, as well as children ages 11 and older should receive the pertussis booster shot, called Tdap, which protects against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis.

The Tdap vaccine is administered in one dose and is approved for people age 11 years through 64.

Pregnant mothers who are delivering at the Barton Family Birthing Center can receive the vaccine after their baby is born with an order by their physician.

“The pertussis vaccine for young children – licensed for children ages six and younger – called DTaP, is administered through a series of five shots, typically at 2, 4, 6 and 12 to 15 months of age, with a booster dose at kindergarten entry,” Wang said.

“Children who complete the series of vaccinations are considered well protected,” she added. “Babies are not considered protected until they have received their first three doses.”

Parents should check their child’s immunization records or contact their child’s doctor to see if their child is current on their vaccinations.

Because the vaccine’s effectiveness can wane over time, it is recommended that children 11 years of age and older receive a booster dose of the pertussis vaccine.

Parents of newborns should be cautious about their baby’s exposure to people who are sick.

“It’s common sense to wash your hands and ask others to wash their hands before holding a baby, and to refrain from being near a newborn if you have any symptoms of illness, especially cold or flu symptoms,” Wang said.

For the pertussis vaccine, contact your primary care provider. If you do not have one, you can go online to www.bartonhealth.org/physicians to find a primary care provider or go to Barton Urgent Care at Stateline Medical Center, 155 Highway 50, Stateline, for an evaluation for possible vaccination.

It is important to note that the Tdap booster vaccine should not be given to someone who has already had the vaccine within the past six years as there could be a severe reaction. Vaccines (DTaP) and booster vaccines (Tdap) are available at the Barton Community Clinic, Barton Family Medicine, Barton Internal Medicine and Barton Pediatrics.

The El Dorado County Health Services Department is also offering low-cost vaccinations for children, as well as boosters for adults. The county health department’s vaccines for children are free and \$10 for those 19 years of age and older. The county health department, located on Johnson Boulevard, is open Mondays from 8-11am; Wednesdays from 1-4pm; and Fridays from 8-11am.

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