

Whooping cough: Without booster vaccine, pre-teens at risk for lengthy, disruptive illness



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Another fitful night. A mom lies awake, listening helplessly as her child coughs and coughs. This mom knows tomorrow will be another day of school missed. Soccer practice missed. And for her, another day of work missed. She wonders wearily when it will end.

This cough is whooping cough, also called the “100-day cough” because of its long duration. And the child? Not an infant, as one might expect, but a pre-teen, 11 years old.

Whooping cough—or pertussis—is a serious and very contagious respiratory disease that can cause long, violent coughing fits and the characteristic “whooping” sound that follows when a person gasps for air.

Whooping cough has been on the rise in pre-teens and teens. In 2009, a quarter of the 16,858 cases of pertussis reported in the United States were among 10- through 19-year-olds.

Most children get vaccinated against whooping cough as babies and get a booster shot before starting kindergarten or first grade. But protection from these vaccines wears off, leaving pre-teens at risk for infection that can

cause prolonged illness, disruptions in school and activities, and even hospitalization.

To boost immunity, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends the Tdap vaccine for all 11- and 12-year-olds.

“It’s important for pre-teens to get a one-time dose of Tdap to protect themselves and those around them from whooping cough,” said Anne Schuchat, MD, director of CDC’s National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases. “Young infants are most vulnerable to serious complications from pertussis and can be infected by older siblings, parents, or other caretakers.” For infants, whooping cough can be deadly.

“Unfortunately, the most recent survey shows that only a little more than half of teens have received the Tdap vaccine,” said Dr. Schuchat. “By taking their pre-teen to get Tdap, parents can protect their child and help stop this disease from spreading.”

Tdap is one of three vaccines CDC specifically recommends for pre-teens. The others are the meningococcal vaccine, which protects against meningococcal disease, including bacterial meningitis, and, for girls, the HPV vaccine, which prevents cervical cancer. Boys and young men can get HPV vaccine to prevent genital warts. Of course, the flu vaccine is recommended for everyone six months and older.

Pre-teens should also be up-to-date on so-called childhood vaccines to prevent hepatitis B, chickenpox, polio, measles, mumps, and rubella.

These recommendations are supported by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine.

To learn more, visit CDC’s adolescent vaccine website at <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/preteen> or call 800-CDC-INFO.