



News Release

CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

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CONTACT: Corey Egel | 916.440.7259 | CDPHpress@cdph.ca.gov

Whooping Cough Death Reported of a California Infant
State Public Health Officer Urges Pregnant Women to get Immunized

SACRAMENTO – The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) announced today that an infant from Orange County has died from pertussis, better known as whooping cough. This is the first confirmed infant death from the disease since 2018.

CDPH and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommend that expectant mothers receive the whooping cough booster shot (also called Tdap, or tetanus, diphtheria and acellular pertussis vaccine) at the earliest opportunity between 27 and 36 weeks of every pregnancy, even if previously immunized. Getting immunized during pregnancy boosts the mother, who then passes some of her protective antibodies on to the fetus. This helps protect newborns until they are old enough to begin receiving their own whooping cough immunizations at 6 to 8 weeks of age.

“To give babies the best protection, I urge all pregnant women to get vaccinated against whooping cough as early as possible during the third trimester of every pregnancy,” said Dr. Karen Smith, CDPH Director and State Public Health Officer. “The best way to prevent whooping cough is by getting vaccinated.”

The symptoms of whooping cough vary by age. For children, whooping cough typically starts with a runny nose and cough for one to two weeks. The cough then worsens and often results in rapid coughing spells that end with a whooping sound. Young infants may not have typical whooping cough symptoms and may have no apparent cough. Parents may describe episodes in which breathing briefly stops and the infant’s face turns red or purple. For adults, whooping cough may be a cough illness that lasts for several weeks.

Most health plans cover Tdap immunizations, and many pharmacies offer it. Medi-Cal members may be able to get their Tdap shots at the pharmacy where they usually pick up their prescriptions. Call your health plan to learn more. If you do not have health insurance, call your [local health department](#) to find a low- or no-cost location.

More information about [pertussis is available on CDPH’s website](#).

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