

GROWING UP

Protecting Children from Pertusis

By Dan Florell, Ph.D. & Praveena Salins, M.D.

It starts off innocently enough as the four month old baby starts having a runny nose, mild cough, and low grade fever. It sounds like a typical cold and one which most parents don't worry about. Unfortunately, this is not an ordinary cold as the disease goes into the second week and the cough becomes more persistent and violent. In addition, the cough begins to have a "whoop" sound to it. The disease is pertussis or whooping cough and it can be life threatening in infants.

Pertusis is a highly contagious bacterial infection that is spread through coughing. These outbreaks are common in Kentucky and have recently occurred in Madison County. The good news is that infants don't have to be at-risk as there is an effective vaccine that can be given to infants and toddlers. However to be effective, the vaccine must be administered multiple times to the infant and toddler. The pertusis vaccine is typically administered at 2, 4, and 6 months of age with another round at 15 months and 4 years old. The last vaccination booster is given when the child turns 11 years old.

Due to being a vaccine that requires multiple administrations, it is important that infants and toddlers are minimally exposed to pertusis until their vaccinations are fully completed. This means that adults who are around infants and toddlers should also be vaccinated. Any main caregiver such as parents, grandparents, and daycare workers should be vaccinated. Teachers should also strongly consider being vaccinated. Often the vaccinations for adults can occur at the pediatrician's office. Other places parents can get the pertusis vaccine include the caregiver's doctor, health department, or pharmacies.

Despite all precautions, infants and toddlers can still come down with pertusis. Quick treatment is the key and the doctor can do a nasal swab test to confirm whether the infant or toddler has pertusis. Since pertusis is a bacterial infection, a round of antibiotics can be issued to get the disease under control.

This is a great time to start getting the pertusis vaccination while most of us are healthy and the cold and flu bugs are still far off. If you are around infants and toddlers, get your pertusis vaccination at your next doctor's visit.

Biography:

Dan Florell, Ph.D., is an assistant professor at Eastern Kentucky University and has a private practice, MindPsi (www.mindpsi.net). Praveena Salins, M.D., is a pediatrician at Madison Pediatric Associates (www.madisonpeds.com).