



Patterson and Tedford Pediatrics

May 20, 2010

Pertussis Outbreak in San Luis Obispo County

The past couple of weeks in North County SLO have seen a dramatic and unexpected increase in pertussis aka whooping cough. We have had a hand full of cases diagnosed in our office but the worrisome news relates to two infants with pertussis whose disease was so severe that they were intubated (a breathing tube was placed in their trachea) and placed on a ventilator to assist their breathing. Their care required transfer out of the county to the pediatric intensive care unit at Cottage Hospital in Santa Barbara.

Pertussis is an especially bad disease for infants and an unpleasant experience for older children and adults. The Chinese refer to it as the "100 day cough". The cough is paroxysmal and sometimes so severe that the victim can strain chest muscles and even fracture ribs. The distinctive harsh cough is often associated with severe choking spells and apnea (cessation of breathing) in young infants. The end of the coughing/choking event is sometimes characterized by an inspiratory whoop that is so distinctive that older pediatricians can make a presumptive diagnosis based only upon hearing a coughing spell. If you would like to hear this sound check out soundsofpertussis.com.

Be concerned about pertussis if you or your child has a persistent cough (>2 weeks) that started with cold- like symptoms. In the early stages of pertussis the illness may appear to be "no big deal" and is not recognized as the potentially severe and life threatening disease that pertussis is for young children. A

test to confirm or rule out pertussis is generally done on mucus from the posterior pharynx (back of the nose). The pertussis bacteria is frequently hard to grow and cultures can take a week before results are definitive. More rapid immunologic tests are available and can sometimes provide an answer in a day or two. Infants almost always require hospitalization but older children and adults are rarely that ill.

This disease is highly contagious. Parents, grandparents and direct hands on care providers are frequently the source of pertussis infection in young infants. Household contacts as well as the patient are commonly treated with antibiotics to interrupt the spread of the bacteria. Children and adults with pertussis must be excluded from school or the workplace until they have completed a full antibiotic treatment. Unfortunately the antibiotic does little to help with the symptoms.

Vaccination against pertussis is imperfect but still is the best way to prevent the disease. Special attention should be given to unvaccinated parents with infants less than a year of age. We suggest that children over the age of 11 and adults under the age of 65 be vaccinated against pertussis. The name of the vaccine is Tdap (trade name ADACEL®).

Please check your children's vaccine records (you can do this online through our website) or give us a call to be sure your child is protected. Give us a call if you are uncertain and yes...we do vaccinate parents and grandparents of our patients.

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PTP has scheduled special dedicated vaccine clinics to accommodate adolescents and parents who have not yet been vaccinated with Tdap (Adacel®)
