

Tdap Vaccine (Tetanus/Diphtheria/Pertussis)

Do you think that whooping cough is a disease from your childhood and not a problem today?

It's actually common in the United States, and cases usually peak every few years. In 2010, which brought large outbreaks, there were 27,550 reported cases of whooping cough. In 2012, there were more than 42,000 reported cases of whooping cough.

Whooping cough spreads easily and can cause severe illness and even death. It is especially dangerous for infants under 6 months of age, who are too young to be well protected by vaccines for whooping cough.

In October 2012, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted to recommend administration of a dose of Tdap during each pregnancy irrespective of the patient's prior history of receiving Tdap. This strategy not only helps protect the mother from getting and passing pertussis on to her infant, but also provides passive immunity to the infant.

A recent U.S. study looked to see how effective Tdap was at preventing pertussis in infants whose mothers got the vaccine while pregnant or in the hospital after giving birth. The study found that getting Tdap during gestational weeks 27 through 36 weeks is 85 percent more effective at preventing pertussis in infants younger than 2 months old.

To maximize the passive antibody transfer to the infant, Tdap is administered during the early part of gestational weeks 27 through 36. The level of pertussis antibodies decreases over time, so Tdap should be administered during every pregnancy in order to transfer the greatest number of protective antibodies to each infant.

"Babies who get whooping cough often catch it from family members, including grandparents, who may not even know they have whooping cough," said Dr. Nancy Messonnier, Director of the National Center for Immunization and Respiratory Diseases at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). "That's why it's important that parents, grandparents, and other family members get a Tdap shot to prevent getting—and spreading—whooping cough."

Family members can receive Tdap in the hospital when the mother is postpartum.