

## ***Protect Babies from Whooping Cough. Get Vaccinated.***

As parents, we protect our babies from everything possible. However, the most common way that babies get pertussis, commonly known as whooping cough, is from a parent, grandparent or sibling. In fact, 80% of infant pertussis cases come from a household member. Pertussis is a very contagious disease that can be deadly for infants who get it. While the vaccination is the best protection, infants are not fully protected until after they are 6 months old. It is during this window they are most commonly exposed to pertussis from a sibling, parent, grandparent, or caregiver.

The process of vaccinating everyone around an infant is called cocooning. Cocooning is a strategy to provide protection to infants who are not fully immunized. By vaccinating all individuals in close contact with the infant, it reduces the chance the infant to be exposed to pertussis. Cocooning is a strategy recommended for families who are expecting a new baby and those with babies under 6 months of age. By getting a Tdap vaccination, adults and adolescents remain disease free and prevent the passing of pertussis to an infant. New moms and dads can encourage grandparents, caregivers, friends, and others who will be spending time with their infant to get vaccinated for pertussis.

Immunity against pertussis decreases over time. This is why it is important for teens and adults to get the Tdap booster in order to protect their loved ones and friends. In adults and adolescents whose immunity is decreasing, or who were not vaccinated, pertussis may initially seem like a common cold with a persistent cough. So, most of these individuals will be unaware they are infected with and can spread pertussis. In infants, pertussis can cause a severe cough (some with the characteristic “whoop”) which can cause breathing difficulty and may provoke episodes of apnea (breathing that temporarily stops). The disease can be devastating to infants, especially in those less than six months old. Death from pertussis is most common in infants under one year of age. Most infants with pertussis get it from a close family member who unknowingly spread the disease. Anyone in close contact with an infant can easily spread the disease including the child’s mother, father, siblings, grandparents, family friends, and other caregivers such as nannies and child care providers.

Expectant mothers can also enhance the effects of cocooning by getting a Tdap vaccination while they are pregnant. When the mom is vaccinated, the pertussis antibodies that fight infection can be passed through the placenta to the baby and can provide a measure of protection. Pregnant women should receive the Tdap vaccine during each pregnancy, preferably at 27-36 weeks. This is the best time for an expectant mother to transfer protection to an infant. If a woman isn’t vaccinated during pregnancy, a Tdap vaccination right after birth

is recommended. However, it takes two weeks after vaccination for the body to become immune against pertussis, leaving a baby vulnerable for this time period.

Tdap vaccinations will be available at no cost at the following community clinics to people over age 11:

- ELIM Christian Fellowship Church, 525 East 9th Street, Des Moines, Iowa 50309  
Sunday, May 19, 2013 after 8:00 & 10:30 AM Services.
- The Polk County Health Department's booth at Juneteenth at Evelyn Davis Park  
Saturday, June 15, 2013

Tdap vaccinations are also available at your health care provider. Vaccinations are available at the Polk County Health Department to people of all ages. Some may qualify for free vaccinations. Bring your insurance card and immunization records. Call for an appointment Mon-Fri from 8-5 and until 7:00 on Tuesdays, 286-3798.