

Auckland Regional Public Health Service

Rātonga Hauora ā Iwi o Tamaki Makaurau



Working with the people of Auckland, Counties Manukau and Waitemata

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Media Release

Wednesday, 14 January 2009

Need to protect our babies: Auckland's rise in whooping cough rates is a reminder to immunise babies on time

Auckland Regional Public Health Service (ARPHS) is warning of a recent rise in the number of people with whooping cough (pertussis) in greater Auckland and is urging parents to immunise their babies on time. The number of cases of whooping cough notified to ARPHS has more than doubled in the past six weeks compared with the same period a year ago.*

"We are urging parents to get their babies immunised and it's critical to do it at the right times," said Dr Cathy Pikholtz, ARPHS's medical officer of health.

Babies should be vaccinated at 6 weeks, 3 months and 5 months, and then children should have booster doses at 4 and 11 years. These vaccinations give babies and children the best protection from whooping cough.

Young babies under one year are most at risk of serious complications from whooping cough. Around seven out of ten babies who catch whooping cough when they are under six months old are hospitalised. One in thirty of those hospitalised die.

Babies who do not receive their immunisations on time have a 4 – 6 times increased risk of being hospitalised (Grant C et al, BMJ April 2003). Therefore babies who are unimmunised or late for their immunisation are at particularly high risk.

The other key message to parents is to keep young babies away from anyone with a cough. Adults and older children with non-specific coughs may have unrecognised whooping cough and are often the source of infection for babies.

Look for signs and symptoms. Whooping cough starts with symptoms of a runny nose and dry cough. Coughing gets worse over the next few weeks developing into prolonged coughing attacks. The 'whoop' sound occurs as the baby draws a breath in after a long coughing attack. Babies might go blue or stop breathing during coughing attacks. Older children and adults may not 'whoop' they may just have a cough. Babies, children and some adults may vomit after coughing attacks.

If anyone has a cough that lasts for more than a week and/or is severe (especially if there are any symptoms suggesting whooping cough) they should go and see their doctor.

If parents or caregivers have any questions about whooping cough they can call the Immunisation Advisory Centre free on **0800 466863** to get the facts on immunisation.

For more facts about whooping cough go to <http://www.immune.org.nz/?t=595>

* Sixteen cases of whooping cough were notified to ARPHS from 1 December 2008 to 13 January 2009, compared with 6 cases notified over the same period a year ago.

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