

Children's Health

Teens At Risk For Pertussis: High School Students May Be Missing An Important Immunization

(NAPSA)—Many older teens may be at risk for pertussis, or whooping cough, a highly contagious disease that can cause difficulty breathing and sleeping, and lengthy absence from school. Whooping cough has been on the rise among adolescents in the past few decades, and numerous outbreaks have been reported across the country this year.

Infants are routinely vaccinated against pertussis, but immunity wanes over five to ten years, leaving adolescents vulnerable to the disease. To help protect adolescents, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has been recommending a tetanus, diphtheria and acellular pertussis vaccine, often called a Tdap booster, for 11-12 year olds since 2006. That means today's older adolescents (those 15-18 years of age) may not have received the vaccine when they were preteens because it wasn't available yet. "Many older teens have fallen through the cracks," says Dr. Joseph Domachowske, professor of pediatrics and immunology specialist at SUNY Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, N.Y. "In fact, a CDC survey found that only 19 percent of 17 year olds have been immunized against the disease."

About Pertussis

Pertussis is highly contagious. In fact, 50 to 80 percent of unvaccinated children who are in school with someone who has pertussis will also catch the disease. On average, students can miss up to five and a half days of school. The



Because immunity wanes over time, the CDC recommends that all adolescents and adults 11-64 years of age receive a Tdap booster to help protect against pertussis. For more information, visit www.cdc.gov.

disease is easily mistaken for a common cold or bronchitis among adolescents and adults during its early stages.

What Parents Can Do

Fortunately, parents can help protect their teens with the Tdap booster. "Many schools have recently mandated the Tdap vaccine for sixth or seventh graders and we are seeing higher immunization rates among these younger adolescents than we are among high schoolers," says Dr. Domachowske. "The bottom line is whether or not your school requires the pertussis booster, if your 11-18 year old hasn't had it, he or she is at risk for the disease. You should talk to your health-care provider to ensure that your teens are up-to-date on this immunization."

Learn More

For more information, visit www.pertussis.com.