

Parents Urged To Protect Children Against “Whooping Cough”

(NAPSA)—As a nurse, Mary-Clayton Enderlein tends to sick children every day. But her work hit home when her own newborn son, Colin, contracted pertussis disease or “whooping cough,” as it is more commonly known.

“Seven days after I was exposed, I began coughing. I gave my newborn son pertussis the moment the nurse placed his tiny body in my arms,” recalls Enderlein.

Lisa Rae, a Philadelphia business professor, also recalls the heart-wrenching experience of watching her youngest of three children, Kyle, suffer through the disease for the first few weeks of his life.

“We still don’t know how my son caught pertussis,” recalls Rae. “I only wish that he wasn’t so young when it happened and we had an opportunity to prevent it.”

Unfortunately, stories like Mary-Clayton’s and Lisa Rae’s have become all too common in the U.S. Even though pertussis is preventable through regular childhood immunizations, more than 8,000 U.S. children contracted the disease last year, with 15 fatal cases in young infants. In 2002, the U.S. experienced its highest number of pertussis cases in 36 years.

Pertussis, a severe childhood disease that can cause long coughing spells over several weeks, is named for the ‘whoop’ sound a

sick child makes after coughing desperately, then drawing in air with a loud gasp.

In older children and adults, symptoms such as the whoop sound, for which the disease is known, may not be present. Such milder cases are often undiagnosed and may become responsible for passing the disease to infants and young children, who are the most vulnerable to serious complications from pertussis.

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For example, in her ninth month of pregnancy, Mary-Clayton came into contact with the sick child of a friend and almost immediately began to show all the classic signs of mild whooping cough.

“I was familiar with the unique sound of the disease from my work as a nurse and suspected that my friend’s child (who had not been vaccinated) had whooping cough and passed it along to me,” recalls Enderlein. “Many parents don’t understand how

infants can catch pertussis. Older children, adults, or parents like myself may have a mild form of the disease and be completely unaware.”

Today, Enderlein and Rae work with PKIDS (Parents of Kids with Infectious Diseases) to educate parents about how to protect their children from pertussis through immunization.

Since 1976 when U.S. cases reached an all-time low, the disease has made a steady comeback. It is important to protect children against all severities of pertussis disease and to complete all recommended doses in the childhood immunization series.

Pertussis is one of the most contagious diseases known to affect children in the U.S. Young children under 12 months of age are at highest risk for severe illness, complications, and death. In some cases, pertussis can cause pneumonia, swelling of the brain, ear infection, dehydration, anorexia, and even death.

For more information about whooping cough, talk to your healthcare provider or visit www.pertussis.com, an educational Web site developed by NAPNAP (the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners). Recently, NAPNAP and PKIDS (www.pkids.org) have partnered to raise awareness of this devastating disease.