Whooping cough vaccine a matter of public health, not philosophy

By ACSH Staff — February 24, 2011

Pertussis, better known as whooping cough, came back with a vengeance in 2010, infecting over 21,000 people — the highest incidence [1] since 2005 and among the worst years of infection in over half a century.

U.S. health officials reported Wednesday that no state got hit harder than California where 8,300 cases of whooping cough were reported and 10 babies died. Nationally, even though about 95 percent of children received at least three shots against whooping cough, only an estimated 6 percent of adults are fully immunized. But contagious adolescents and adults are a particular threat to vulnerable infants; therefore, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices is now recommending [2] the whooping cough vaccine for any adults who will have contact with babies.

Explaining why California bore the brunt of the whooping cough epidemic last year, Dr. Ross focuses on one main reason: “California remains one of 20 states that permits children to attend school without the required vaccinations — they allow so-called ‘philosophical exemptions.’ Not only should this practice be abolished, but it gives parents the license to allow their child to get infected and pass it on to other classmates — something we should not be tolerating in modern society.”

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