Protect the most vulnerable: Get your pertussis vaccine!

By ACSH Staff — June 19, 2013

We have certainly advised on multiple occasions that everyone keep their vaccinations up to date, but it’s important enough to repeat especially in light of a new survey on adult pertussis vaccination. Dr. Matthew Davis, director of the University of Michigan National Poll on Children’s Health, points out that only 20 percent of adults responding to the poll said they had received the vaccine less than 10 years ago, while 19 percent said they had received it more than 10 years ago.

While pertussis (whooping cough) can cause severe coughing in adults, it can be fatal in the very young and infants can’t be vaccinated against the disease until they’re 12 months old. Thus, they are particularly vulnerable to catching it from family members and visitors who come to admire a new baby.

Pertussis spreads easily among groups households, day care facilities, schools, and neighborhoods. Most deaths from it occur in children less than 3 years old.

When queried, 72 percent of survey respondents agreed that parents have the right to insist that visitors receive the whooping cough vaccine before visiting a newborn in the hospital. Further, 61 percent thought that parents should ensure that adults receive the vaccine before visiting a newborn at home.

Dr. Davis commented in the HealthDay report Teens and adults who have received the [whooping cough] vaccine are less likely to get whooping cough themselves, and therefore less likely to spread whooping cough to other people.

ACSH’s Dr. Elizabeth Whelan comments, We need to emphasize the importance of adult vaccinations as often as needed, until the message sinks in to both doctors and patients, to improve the vaccination rate. Certainly primary care and other physicians should be tracking their patients vaccination records and reminding them when additional vaccinations are due, and obstetricians can make sure new parents are aware of the risk of pertussis transmission to the newborns.

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