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May 24, 2010

PERTUSSIS ALERT: LOS ANGELES COUNTY PUBLIC HEALTH WARNS OF INCREASED PERTUSSIS (WHOOPING COUGH) ACTIVITY

This alert is to inform health care providers about a marked increase in pertussis activity in Los Angeles County. As of 5/24/10, 112 suspect cases of pertussis have been reported to the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, a little less than half of them having been reported this month. To date this year, there have been two infant deaths from pertussis, the most recent of which occurred two weeks ago.

Health care providers are encouraged to increase their suspicion for pertussis among patients of all ages, especially infants within the first year of life. Classically, pertussis presents as a cough illness lasting at least 14 days, associated with paroxysms of coughing, and or inspiratory whoop, and or post-tussive emesis. Infants under 6 months of age may have cough, choking, cyanosis, without whoop or paroxysms, and a diagnosis of pertussis should not be delayed to satisfy the 14-day "duration of cough" criteria used for adults. An attempt should be made to confirm all suspect pertussis cases by culture or PCR, using appropriate bacterial media (consult with your laboratory to ensure you have the appropriate specimen collection materials available).

Prompt reporting of suspect pertussis cases is vital to prevent secondary spread to susceptible persons (do not wait until culture results are back to report a case). Report suspect cases in Los Angeles County to the Morbidity Reporting Unit at 888-397-3993 (phone) or 888-397-3778 (fax). For cases among residents of the Cities of Long Beach or Pasadena, call the Long Beach Department of Health and Human Services (562-570-4302) or the Pasadena City Health Department (626-744-6000).

Please remember that persons who were immunized against pertusis as children may still be susceptible to infection due to waning of their immunity over time. The Tdap booster (in place of the Td booster) is now routinely recommended for preteens. It is especially important that all adolescents and adult persons in households where a newborn resides, or will soon reside, receive the Tdap booster if they have not already received it. Post-partum women, also, need to be vaccinated with Tdap if they were not vaccinated prior to pregnancy.

If technical assistance is needed, please consult the Los Angeles County Immunization Program Surveillance Unit (213-351-7800).