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COUNTY OF ORANGE HEALTH CARE AGENCY

PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

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AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE REGARDING PERTUSSIS (WHOOPING COUGH) AND THE NEW SCHOOL ENTRY LAW

We are currently experiencing an epidemic of pertussis, commonly called “whooping cough,” in Orange County. It is called whooping cough because of the deep persistent cough which may be followed by a crowing sound (“whoop”) when breathing in. It usually starts like a common cold and gets worse over 1-2 weeks. Coughing may also be accompanied by vomiting, gagging, choking or turning blue. The cough can last for weeks.

Pertussis is very contagious. It is usually spread by droplets produced when a person with pertussis coughs. It poses great risk to newborns and some other members of our community. Vaccinations received in early childhood lose effectiveness and a booster vaccination, call Tdap, is needed to prevent the disease. Tdap includes boosters for tetanus and diphtheria in addition to pertussis.

If your child is aged 10 years or older and has not yet received the Tdap pertussis booster shot, he or she should get one now. A booster now will meet the requirements of a new law for the 2011-12 school year that states, “***all students entering the 7th through 12th grades will need proof of a Tdap booster shot before beginning school***” (California law – Assembly Bill 354). In addition, if your child is 7 to 9 years of age and did not receive all his/her early childhood pertussis immunizations, he/she should get a Tdap shot now, which will also satisfy the school requirement. You will be required to present proof that your child has met this requirement as a condition of school entry.

Adults are also advised to get a pertussis booster shot, if they haven’t already, to protect themselves, their families, and students. This is particularly important for people, including pregnant women, who are, or will be, in close contact with infants.

You can get more information about pertussis and Tdap vaccine from your physician or go to the Orange County Health Care Agency’s web site at www.ochca.com/pertussis or call the Orange County Health Care Agency at 1-800-564-8448.

Sincerely,

Eric G. Handler, MD, MPH, FAAP
Deputy Agency Director/Health Officer