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**Region IV Public Health**  
Clark, Cowlitz, Skamania, Wahkiakum counties  
and Cowlitz Tribe

**Health Advisory**

Please deliver a copy of the accompanying alert to each provider in your organization.  
**Thank you**

**Questions regarding this alert may be  
directed to the office of:**

**Alan Melnick, MD, MPH  
Health Officer**

Clark County Public Health  
Cowlitz County Health Department  
Skamania County Health Department  
Wahkiakum County Department of Health and Human Services  
(360) 397-8412  
**Please Distribute**

Categories of Health Alert messages:

**Health Alert:** conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

**Health Advisory:** provides important information for specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

**Health Update:** provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; no immediate action necessary.



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## HEALTH ADVISORY

March 28, 2013

TO: Physicians and other Healthcare Providers

FROM: Alan Melnick, MD, MPH, CPH, Health Officer

RE: **New ACIP recommendation: Tdap for ALL pregnant women**

In October 2012, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) voted to recommend that ALL pregnant women receive Tdap vaccination during each pregnancy irrespective of their prior history of receiving Tdap. There are several reasons for this new recommendation:

- In 2010, 27,550 cases of pertussis were reported in the United States; 3,350 of those cases were in infants younger than 6 months of age. 25 of those infants died. Studies have shown that when the source of pertussis was identified, mothers were responsible for 30–40% of infant infections.
- Pertussis can cause serious and sometimes life-threatening complications in infants, especially within the first 6 months of life. In infants younger than 1 year of age who get pertussis, more than half must be hospitalized. The younger the infant, the more likely treatment in the hospital will be needed
- Transplacental transfer of maternal pertussis antibodies from mother to infant may provide protection against pertussis in early life, before beginning the primary DTaP series. There is evidence of efficient transplacental transfer of pertussis antibodies to infants. The effectiveness of maternal antibodies in preventing infant pertussis is not yet known, but pertussis antibodies can protect against some disease and the severe outcomes that come along with it. **And, a woman vaccinated with Tdap vaccine during pregnancy will also herself be protected at time of delivery and will be less likely to transmit pertussis to her newborn infant. By vaccinating a woman with Tdap during pregnancy her infant will gain pertussis antibodies during the most vulnerable time – before three months of age.**
- The strategy of protecting infants from pertussis by vaccinating those in close contact with them is known as “cocooning.” ACIP has recommended cocooning with Tdap vaccine since 2005 and continues to recommend this strategy for all those with expected close contact with newborns. In addition to vaccinating your patients, you should educate them about encouraging others – including dads, grandparents and other caregivers – to get vaccinated with Tdap at least two weeks before coming into contact with their infants. However, **full implementation of cocooning has proven to be a challenge; vaccinating during pregnancy provides the best opportunity to protect infants from pertussis.**

- Although providing this early immunity may interfere with the infant's immune response to DTaP vaccine, the benefits of vaccinating during pregnancy and protecting a newborn outweigh the potential risk of blunting the infant's response to DTaP vaccine. Since infants are at greatest risk of severe disease and death from pertussis before 3 months of age – when their immune systems are least developed – any protection that can be provided is critical. Infants whose mothers received the vaccine during pregnancy should still receive their DTaP vaccines on schedule, starting at 2 months of age.
- There are currently no pertussis vaccines licensed or recommended for newborns at birth. The best way to prevent pertussis in a young infant is by vaccinating the mother during pregnancy.
- Breastfeeding is not a contraindication for receiving Tdap vaccine. Tdap vaccine can and should be given to women who plan to breastfeed. Breastfeeding is fully compatible with Tdap vaccination, and preventing pertussis in mothers can reduce the chance that the infant will get pertussis. Also, by breastfeeding, mothers can pass antibodies they've made in response to the Tdap shot on to their infants, which may reduce an infant's chances of getting sick with pertussis. This is especially important for infants younger than 6 months of age, who have no other way of receiving enough pertussis antibodies, since they are not fully protected until their third dose of DTaP vaccine at 6 months of age.
- Tdap is safe for pregnant women. ACIP concluded that there is no elevated frequency or an unusual occurrence of adverse events among pregnant women who have received Tdap vaccine, or in their newborns.

Although rates of pertussis infection in Washington State have declined from recent epidemic levels, they remain higher than pre-epidemic levels. We expect that vaccinating your patients with Tdap during pregnancy will prevent more infant hospitalizations and deaths than cocooning alone.

Administering Tdap vaccine after 20 weeks gestation optimizes antibody transfer and protection at birth. **The immune response to the vaccine peaks two weeks after administration.** To maximize the maternal antibody response and passive antibody transfer to the infant, optimal timing for Tdap administration is between 27 and 36 weeks gestation.

Vaccination with Tdap during pregnancy is ideal. However, if a woman does not get vaccinated during pregnancy, administer the vaccine immediately postpartum, before she leaves the hospital or birthing center. Also, please advise your patients that other adults who will be around newborns, such as husbands, grandparents, older siblings, and babysitters, should also receive the vaccine. Physicians and other healthcare providers should administer Tdap to pregnant women regardless of when Td was last received.

If you have questions, please call:

- Clark County Public Health: (360) 397-8182
- Cowlitz County Health and Human Services: (360) 414-5599
- Skamania County Community Health: (509) 427-3850
- Wahkiakum County Health and Human Services (360) 795-6207

Thank you for your partnership.