

Austin Immediate Care physicians warn about whooping cough

AUSTIN, TX--In light of the current whooping cough (pertussis) epidemic in California, which is on pace to be the largest there in decades, physicians at Austin Immediate Care express concern for the residents of the Austin, Texas area:

While whooping cough (pertussis) mostly affects infants under one year of age, it can also cause significant symptoms in toddlers and school-age children as well as adults that can last up to three months or longer if untreated. The bacteria that cause pertussis can be spread by children who did not receive their vaccines or by adults who may have received the vaccines as children but did not receive a booster and are no longer immune. While all infants and children should be vaccinated in the regimen recommended by the Centers for Disease Control, older children and adults also must be up to date with their vaccines, both to prevent them from getting sick themselves and so they don't aid and abet the transmission of pertussis to others.

Most states have public health regulations that require immunization against pertussis (as well as tetanus and diphtheria) among infants and pre-schoolers, "but not every parent follows these guidelines," says [Austin Immediate Care](#) medical director Jordan Laroe, M.D. "This appears to be part of the problem in California and what we want to avoid in Texas.

"Parents who do not vaccinate their children leave them vulnerable to a highly infectious and devastating disease."

The California Dept. of Public Health, in a July 19th press briefing, says the state is facing an epidemic. Between Jan. 1 and July 16, there were 1,496 reported cases of pertussis and another 700 cases under investigation. Six infants have died. During all of 2009, there were 965 reported cases and three deaths.

Dr. Laroe is concerned by the rising number of cases of pertussis, both here in Austin and nationwide. She and her colleague at Austin Immediate Care, Brian Bobb, M.D., have seen several cases of pertussis during the past few months, including a patient whose illness was severe enough to require hospitalization.

Pertussis starts like a common cold but then often progresses to intense, almost violent, fits of coughing followed by a forced gulping for air. Some patients present with atypical symptoms, and many infants in particular do not exhibit the characteristic "whooping" sound (hence, its popular name), which can make the diagnosis difficult to make. There is often no or only low grade fever.

Pertussis can cause pneumonia, seizures and death, particularly in infants less than four months of age.

Dr. Laroe's immediate recommendations for the residents of Austin:

- Parents should make sure their children receive the recommended 5-dose primary vaccination series against pertussis (DTaP) at 2, 4, 6 and 15-18 months and at 4-6 years of age.
- Parents must seek medical attention immediately if their child develops a severe cough that interferes with feeding and/or sleeping and for milder coughs that don't improve after a week.

- Adolescents (ideally at age 11-12) and adults should receive a booster vaccine for pertussis.
- Anyone who has been in close contact with a known or suspected case of pertussis should seek medical care to determine if testing, antibiotic prophylaxis and/or boost vaccination is indicated.
- Adults with severe cough or coughs lasting longer than two weeks should be evaluated by a physician.
- Practice and teach your children good cough hygiene (cover your cough, wash your hands frequently, etc.).
- Stay away from infants when you are coughing.

The basis for Dr. Laroe’s concern is a rising incidence of whooping cough in Travis and the other counties surrounding the Austin area. While not nearly approaching epidemic proportions, the numbers have risen significantly in the past five years, as expressed below as incidences of pertussis per 100,000 population. Preliminary 2010 figures for Travis County indicate a slight decrease early in the year but then an increase since June.

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Travis	60.8	15.0	12.9	9.5	71.9
Williamson	75.9	31.4	29.4	18.1	256.5
Bastrop	40.6	11.2	5.5	5.2	26.6
Caldwell	7.8	11.2	2.8	2.7	28.9
Hays	33.4	10.5	6.4	2.7	8.9

Source: Texas Dept. State Health Services: Incidence per 100,000 population