



National Poll on Children's Health

Protecting Newborns from Whooping Cough

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Report Highlights

72% of adults agree that parents have the right to insist that visitors receive the pertussis vaccine before visiting a newborn baby in the hospital.

61% of adults agree that parents should make sure all adults receive the pertussis vaccine before visiting a newborn baby at home.

61% of adults report that they don't know when they were last vaccinated against pertussis.

Pertussis, also known as “whooping cough,” affected more than 41,000 U.S. children and adults in 2012. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that rates of pertussis are at their highest level in 50 years. Pertussis easily spreads within households, daycares, schools and neighborhoods. It can cause serious illness in infants and young children, and the majority of deaths from pertussis occur in children less than 3 months old.

Effective vaccines against pertussis (included in the “DTaP” vaccine) have been available and recommended for infants and children for many decades. In addition, pertussis vaccines are now available and recommended for teens and adults (known as the “Tdap” vaccine), including pregnant women. Boosting immunity against pertussis among teens and adults is especially important for protecting newborns, who cannot be vaccinated until 2 months of age. Most infants with pertussis got the illness from an older child or adult with pertussis.

In January 2013 the C.S. Mott Children's Hospital National Poll on Children's Health asked a national sample of adults for their opinions about protecting newborns against pertussis.

Support for Pertussis Vaccine for Adults

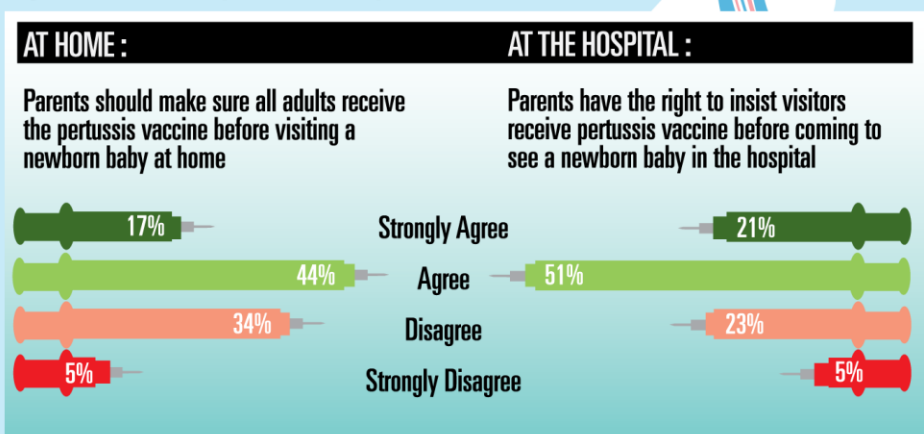
Most adults (61%) report they don't know when they last received a vaccination against pertussis. Only 20% of adults report they received the pertussis vaccine within the past 10 years (the recommended time frame).

The majority of adults (72%) strongly agree or agree that parents have the right to insist that visitors receive the pertussis vaccine before visiting a newborn baby in the hospital. Nearly two-thirds (61%) of adults strongly agree or agree that parents should make sure all adults receive the pertussis vaccine before visiting a newborn baby at home. Only 5% of adults strongly disagree with these parental approaches (Figure 1.).

Contact us

A publication from C.S. Mott Children's Hospital, the University of Michigan Department of Pediatrics and Communicable Diseases, and the University of Michigan Child Health Evaluation and Research (CHEAR) Unit.

Figure 1. **Opinions about Protecting Babies by Vaccinating Adults against Pertussis**



Source: C.S. Mott Children Hospital National Poll on Children's Health, 2013

This report presents findings from a nationally representative household survey conducted exclusively by GfK Custom Research, LLC (GfK), for C.S. Mott Children's Hospital via a method used in many published studies. The survey was administered in January 2013 to a randomly selected, stratified group of adults age 18 and older (n=2,182) from GfK's web-enabled KnowledgePanel® that closely resembles the U.S. population. The sample was subsequently weighted to reflect population figures from the Census Bureau. The survey completion rate was 61% among the panel members contacted to participate. The margin of error is ± 1 to 4 percentage points.

Implications

The increasing number of cases of whooping cough in the United States over the past twenty years have led to changes in vaccination strategies for this potentially fatal disease. The most notable change has been to start using the Tdap vaccine – known by some as the whooping cough booster shot – for teens and adults.

Public health experts and doctors now know that vaccine-based protection against whooping cough naturally decreases over time. The Tdap vaccine helps build up protection again against whooping cough in people who received pertussis vaccine when they were infants and young children. Teens and adults who have received the Tdap vaccine are less likely to get whooping cough themselves, and therefore less likely to spread whooping cough to other people—including infants who have not yet gotten protected by their own pertussis vaccination.

National data indicate that two-thirds or more of teens have received their Tdap vaccination. In contrast, findings from this Poll and other national data indicate that few adults have received their whooping cough booster shot within the last 10 years (the recommended time frame). Moreover, almost two-thirds of adults were not aware of their Tdap vaccination status, and thus cannot be sure they are able to prevent the spread of pertussis to a vulnerable newborn.

Together, these findings emphasize how important it is for parents of newborns—whose children are at greatest risk for serious and sometimes fatal pertussis illness—to take certain steps to protect their children from whooping cough. In this Poll, we find broad support from adults across the country for parents who want to insist that adults who come to see their newborns in the hospital or at home have received the pertussis vaccine beforehand. This parental approach, if it becomes the standard, may have a very positive impact decreasing the number of newborns who become severely ill or die as a result of pertussis.

Expectant parents should have a conversation about pertussis vaccine with their family and close friends BEFORE the baby is born. This will allow time for those individuals to seek out pertussis vaccine from their doctor's office or a local health department, so that when the infant arrives, he or she can be welcomed in a safe way by family and friends.

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