



News Release

Whooping cough cases reach epidemic levels in much of Washington

All teens and adults need a whooping cough booster

OLYMPIA Today Secretary of Health Mary Selecky announced that whooping cough disease has reached epidemic levels in Washington. So far in 2012, 640 cases have been reported in 23 counties as of March 31. This compares to 94 cases during this same time period last year, putting Washington on-pace to have the highest number of reported cases in decades.

“We’re very concerned about the continued rapid increase in reported cases,” said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. “This disease can be very serious for young babies, who often get whooping cough from adults and other family members. We want all teens and adults who haven’t had Tdap to be vaccinated to help protect babies that are too young for the vaccine.”

[Whooping Cough](#)

Whooping cough vaccines are recommended for all children and adults. The shots children get wear off over time. Everyone age 11 and older should get a whooping cough booster, called Tdap. It's especially important for anyone who has close contact with babies younger than 12 months to get a dose of Tdap to help protect the baby from whooping cough. This includes parents, siblings, grandparents, health care providers, and child care providers.

"Many adults don't realize they need to be vaccinated, or they assume they have been," said State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes. "We're asking everyone to verify with their health care provider that they're up-to-date on vaccines. We're also asking everyone to use good health manners — like cover your cough and stay home when you're sick — that will also help prevent spreading whooping cough."

[Whooping cough](http://www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize/diseases/pertussis) (www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/Immunize/diseases/pertussis), also known as pertussis, is a highly contagious respiratory illness spread by coughing and sneezing. It affects people of all ages — but is most serious in infants, especially those too young to get vaccinated or who aren't fully protected. It causes cold-like symptoms followed by a [long, severe cough](#) (www.pkids.org/diseases/pertussis.html) that can last for weeks. Adolescents and adults often get a much milder case of whooping cough, but they can still spread it.

The Department of Health is introducing a new public service radio announcement this week reminding people how serious whooping cough can be and to get vaccinated. The spot features Secretary Selecky along with a Snohomish County Mom who talks about losing her newborn daughter to whooping cough. The [radio announcement is on the agency's website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov/Newsroom/sound/DOH_WA_WhoopingCough_30_329.asx) and will be shared with radio stations across the state.

We're working to raise awareness among health care providers about the epidemic, and providing advice on testing, who should be vaccinated, and treatment guidelines. We're also working closely with local health partners on disease tracking and monitoring to make sure we continue to have current information about the amount of disease in Washington. Weekly updates of [case counts in counties throughout the state are posted online](#) on Tuesday afternoons around three o'clock.

All recommended vaccines are offered at no cost to all kids under 19 through health care provider offices participating in the state's Childhood Vaccine Program. Health care providers may charge an office visit fee and a fee to give the vaccine, called an administration fee. People who cannot afford the administration fee can ask their regular health care provider if they'll waive that cost. Most health insurance carriers will cover the whooping cough vaccine; adults should double check with their health plan.

More information on preventing whooping cough is available on the [Department of Health website](#) (www.doh.wa.gov). Also, [find us on Facebook](#) and [follow us on Twitter](#).

For immediate release: April 3, 2012

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