Latino Babies Hit by Whooping Cough

September 20, 2010

Whooping cough is sweeping through California, and it's taking a toll primarily on Latino babies, reports the *Los Angeles Times*.

California has been hit hard by the bacterial disease, reporting 196 hospitalized patients and nine deaths. Almost 75 percent of the patients were infants younger than 6 months old, and 57 percent were younger than 3 months old. Of all the hospitalized infants, 77 percent were Latino, as were eight of the nine deaths.

Also known as pertussis, whooping cough is a highly contagious disease that causes violent coughs that make it hard to breath. It's often spread to children and babies from parents and siblings who are infected. Even though whooping cough is preventable with a vaccine, it isn't recommended for babies until after they are two months old, which makes infants highly susceptible to the disease.

Health officials in California are urging anyone who will come into contact with babies, including pregnant women, to get the pertussis vaccine.

"People with respiratory conditions and cold-like conditions should not have contact with small infants," said Jonathan Fielding, MD, MPH, director of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health.

Officials have said that Latino infection rates seem to be tied to larger than average families and more frequent visits with extended family members. These factors increase the likelihood of exposure to someone with whooping cough.

Infants should receive inoculations when they are 2, 4 and 6 months old. And everyone should be vaccinated for the flu every year.

For more information on vaccines and immunization, including when and where to get vaccinated, click here.

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