



12 May 2009

Whooping cough epidemic

There has been a 634 per cent increase in the number of reported whooping cough cases in the North Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service.

“There have been 800 reported cases in the first three months of the year, compared to 109 for the same period last year,” the Minister said.

“While April’s figures are not in yet, indications are it was another bad month, so I urge new parents, grandparents and adults who regularly care for infants less than 12 months old, to get vaccinated against whooping cough.

“Free booster vaccinations are available from GPs across the State.

“Earlier this year, public health officers wrote to all new parents throughout NSW advising of arrangements for the free vaccine and contacted all GPs to encourage vaccination to stem the rise in whooping cough cases.

“General Practitioners across NSW were advised in March about the availability of free adult vaccine, ordering arrangements, and a new recommendation about the vaccination of children at six weeks of age,” Mr Della Bosca said.

“NSW Health has sufficient stock of whooping cough vaccine available to meet GP demand.

“This is a serious illness which can result in hospitalisation and even death and we urge all new parents, grandparents and any other adult who regularly cares for infants less than 12 months of age, to get a free booster.

“Symptoms of whooping cough initially may include runny nose, tiredness and mild fever.

“Coughing bouts then develop followed by a big deep gasp that sometimes produces a whooping sound. Vomiting may follow these bouts of coughing. Adults often just have an ongoing cough without the whoop,” the Minister said.

“Whooping cough is easily spread to other people by droplets from coughing, so it is important people are diagnosed and treated early with special antibiotics to help stop it spreading.

“They should also stay away from others, especially small children, until they’re no longer infectious.

“NSW Health recommends all children be given the combination vaccine to protect against six conditions including whooping cough, this vaccine is normally given at two months, four months and six months of age.

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“However, in light of the current outbreak, parents and GPs are asked to bring the first dose forward to six weeks of age to provide earlier protection. A further vaccine is given at four years, with a booster due at around age 15 through the school-based vaccination program,” the Minister added.

For a range of health information go to www.health.nsw.gov.au