

Pertussis prevention is urged

Doctors pushing whooping cough booster shots

By Terri Yablonsky Stat
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Newborn Jolee Kuehl spent 40 days at the University of Chicago Medical Center, 14 of them on a ventilator, after catching whooping cough from her mother at just 15 days old.

"I was misdiagnosed with bronchitis after Jolee's birth," said Crista Kuehl, 28, who saw several doctors in Valparaiso, where she lives with her husband, Mick; Jolee; and an older daughter, Annika.

Whooping cough, a highly contagious respiratory infection marked by violent coughing, has made a comeback in Chicago and other parts of the country. Health officials are urging adolescents and adults — especially those who interact with newborns — to get a whooping cough booster shot.

"We're seeing more whooping cough than we used to," said Dr. Kenneth Alexander, head of pediatric infectious diseases at the University of Chicago. That's partly because we live in a global world, Alexander said, but improved diagnostic tests allow health care providers to recognize it more.

In 2010, Chicago had 95 confirmed cases of whooping cough, also known as pertussis, up from 49 in 2009, according to the Chi-

"The scariest part is when Jolee would stop breathing."

— Crista Kuehl, whose daughter Jolee developed whooping cough at 15 days



Crista Kuehl says her youngest daughter, Jolee, contracted whooping cough because she had been misdiagnosed with bronchitis at the time Jolee was born. Jolee spent 40 days in a hospital. GREGG GEARHART/PHOTO FOR THE TRIBUNE

ago Department of Public Health.

When a person with whooping cough tries to breathe between fits of coughs, a characteristic "whooping" sound is often heard. Infants, however, may not have a severe cough; instead they may choke and periodically stop breathing, said Alexander.

Though many adults were immunized as children, immunity wanes after about five to 10 years. In adults who cough longer than two weeks, 15 percent to 20 percent have whooping cough, Alexander said. A suspected case should be treated with antibiotics, which he said won't shorten the duration of the cough, but will help keep the patient from being infectious.

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The Chicago Department of Public Health recommends that adults and children ages 11 to 12 get a whooping cough booster shot, called Tdap, that replaces the regular tetanus booster shot given every 10 years. Tdap immunizes against tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis. The Health Department also has used federal funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to purchase 14,070 doses of Tdap vaccine and distributed them to 13 birthing hospitals to immunize

postpartum women before they are discharged.

Vaccinating those around newborns, such as grandparents and caregivers, also is critical. "We refer to it as cocoon immunization," said Alexander. "Since babies don't respond well to the vaccine and are vulnerable for the first four months of life, let's vaccinate everybody in contact with them."

Alexander said immunizing schoolchildren reduces the chance other children will get whooping cough. "Estimates are that

if a kid in a class is unvaccinated, the risk of pertussis for all the kids in the class goes up thirtyfold."

At the U. of C., officials are creating a webcast to educate nurses at some private schools in Chicago about the epidemiology, signs and symptoms of pertussis.

The Kuehls, both schoolteachers, called everyone they knew who had been around Jolee to tell them to get treated and revaccinated. They are thankful Jolee has fully recovered.

"The scariest part is when Jolee would stop breathing and turn blue. There wasn't any whooping sound," said Crista Kuehl. "Whooping cough is lethal. If it wasn't for the staff at the University of Chicago, Jolee could have died."

NOTES

DIABETES DAY
This monthly event includes a free blood sugar check, healthy food tastings and a consultation with endocrinologist Renee Schickler, 11 a.m. Thursday, WISE Senior Center, 4646 N. Marine Drive. For information and registration, call 773-564-5666.

DIABETES LECTURE
Health professionals from Our Lady of the Resurrection Medical Center will speak about diabetes signs and symptoms, diagnoses, treatment and dietary guidelines. 2 p.m. Thursday, 5645 W. Addison St. Free. Registration is required. Call 877-737-4636.

PROSTATE CANCER
Lurie Cancer Center urologist Kevin T. McVary will address the causes and effects of prostate cancer surgery on sexual dysfunction, urinary control and other quality-of-life factors. 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Gilda's Club Chicago, 537 N. Wells St. Free. Call 312-464-9900.

MIND AND MEMORY
Join Swedish Covenant Hospital and Covenant Methodist Senior Services for an afternoon devoted to keeping your brain sharp. Speakers include neuropsychologist Frederick Bylsma and Joni Gatz, of Marbles the Brain Store. 2 p.m. Tuesday, Covenant Home of Chicago, 2720 W. Foster Ave. Free. Call 773-878-6888 to register.

VASCULAR CONDITIONS
Weiss Memorial Hospital hosts Dare to CARE, an informational session to explain various vascular conditions such as carotid artery disease, abdominal aortic aneurysms, renal artery stenosis and extremity artery stenosis. 5:30 p.m. Tuesday, 4646 N. Marine Drive. Registration is required. Call 800-503-1234. Send health and wellness items held in Chicago at least two weeks in advance to city@tribune.com.

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