



## **IMPORTANT PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT (all GP Divisions)**

Queensland Health is alerting General Practitioners that the pertussis outbreak that commenced in 2008 has not yet waned, and there continues to be a high number of notified cases in Queensland.

There were over 4700 notifications in Queensland from January 2009 to October 2009, which is more than three times the number usually expected during this period.

The number of cases notified in children less than six months of age in the same period is about 5 times as many as the average for 2004 – 2008. Additionally, the number of notified cases in people of child bearing age has more than doubled.

Infants under 12 months of age have the highest risk for severe disease when infected with pertussis, and can suffer complications resulting in permanent disability or death. There are three main interventions to prevent pertussis in infants:

- infant vaccination;
- vaccination of primary carers; and
- early diagnosis and management of pertussis to minimise spread to infants.

Infants require three vaccinations containing pertussis vaccine, given at 2, 4 and 6 months, to be considered fully protected. If any of these vaccines have been missed, a catch-up schedule should be arranged promptly, as per the *Australian Immunisation Handbook, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition*. The most common source of infection in infants is a parent or sibling.

The National Health and Medical Research Council recommends that all new parents are vaccinated with combined adult diphtheria, tetanus and pertussis vaccine (dTpa) as soon as possible after the baby is born, if they have not previously received this vaccine.

This vaccine is currently available free to new parents and Queensland Health is asking GPs to actively promote (and provide) this vaccine to eligible parents (parents of children born after May 1, 2009).

Other family members who may care for the baby (eg grandparents) should also be considered for vaccination although vaccines for these people must be purchased privately.

In addition, Queensland Health requests that GPs consider the possibility of pertussis in anyone presenting with a prolonged coughing illness, and arrange appropriate investigation and treatment.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. E. Selvey'.

**Dr Christine Selvey**

**Senior Director, Communicable Diseases Branch  
Queensland Health  
13/11/ 09**