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Immunize Pregnant Women to Prevent Infant Pertussis in California

The [first infant pertussis death of 2019](#) has occurred in California. Infants too young to be fully immunized remain most vulnerable to hospitalization and death from pertussis. These hospitalizations and deaths are largely preventable through prenatal Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis) immunization, which is [safe and effective](#). Yet, in a 2016 [survey](#), only 40% of pregnant women insured by Medi-Cal and 65% insured privately received Tdap.

This letter is a reminder for prenatal providers to ensure that all pregnant women are immunized with Tdap at the earliest opportunity between 27-36 weeks gestation of every pregnancy.

All prenatal care providers should:

- Make a strong recommendation for Tdap vaccination, for example, “Now that you’re in the third trimester, I’d like you to get the whooping cough shot before you leave today. Whooping cough causes babies to turn blue, gasp for air, or even die. This immunization will protect your baby from this disease.”
- For all patients, document recommendation and receipt of vaccination or patient declination.¹
- If your patient is hesitant to receive Tdap, keep urging her to get vaccinated at subsequent appointments.

When offering Tdap immunization in your office:

- Offer Tdap and administer it on site regardless of payer. Tdap immunization for pregnant women is covered by insurers, including Medi-Cal. Call your provider relations representative if you are having trouble with reimbursement.
- Consider combining Tdap vaccination with the glucose screening test at 28 weeks.
- Call your electronic health record vendor to request a flag that automatically reminds you to vaccinate all prenatal patients at the appropriate gestational ages.

¹Prenatal Tdap/Influenza Immunization Declination Form is available in [English](#) and [Spanish](#). DHCS contracts require that Medi-Cal Managed Care Plans document patient refusal of the immunization in the form of a signed statement. (See Q17 in the [Medi-Cal Coverage of Immunizations](#) to learn more.)



If not currently offering Tdap immunization in your office:

- [Pregnant women are most likely to receive recommended vaccines if they are offered onsite during a prenatal visit](#); consider beginning to stock Tdap. See ACOG's resources to learn about starting your own [office-based immunization program](#).
- Contact your local health department if your practice includes Medi-Cal members and you are interested in receiving free starter doses of Tdap.
- Until you offer vaccines onsite:
 - Make a strong recommendation and referral. See CDC's [Making a Strong Referral for Pregnant Women](#).
 - Assist patients in locating a local source of Tdap that is covered by their insurance. Medi-Cal Fee for Service (FFS) and Medi-Cal Managed Care Plans (MCPs) cover Tdap vaccine and are required to have the ACIP-recommended adult immunizations (including Tdap) as part of their pharmacy formulary benefit.
 - If referring to a pharmacy, provide patients with a prescription for Tdap vaccination; while not required, it may reinforce the importance of your recommendation. Order free copies of the [pre-filled immunization RX-pad \(IMM-1143\)](#) from your local health department (<http://bit.do/immunization>).
 - Follow-up on the Tdap referral at subsequent prenatal care appointments. Enlist your office staff to obtain documentation of vaccine administration via checking pharmacy notifications² or the California Immunization Registry (CAIR). If not yet vaccinated, keep urging patients to do so to protect their newborn.
- Medi-Cal members are eligible for [free transportation services](#) to receive medically necessary services (e.g., immunization visits)

Additional steps for all prenatal care providers:

- Provide information about immunizations and pregnancy in waiting rooms and exam rooms. Patient materials are available [here](#). Many can be ordered at no cost from your [local health department](#).
- Participate in the California Immunization Registry (CAIR), a computerized information system that collects immunization data from providers throughout California. California pharmacies are required to report immunizations given to a registry. For more information about CAIR, visit <http://cairweb.org/>.
- Review ACIP's [2019 Adult Immunization Schedule](#),
- Visit the CDPH Immunization Branch's [pertussis webpage](#) for the latest summary reports of pertussis cases in California.

Thank you for your efforts to prevent pertussis in vulnerable infants in California.

² [A California Board of Pharmacy regulation](#) requires pharmacies to notify a patient's primary care provider and the woman's prenatal provider (if known), as well as enter any immunization given to an immunization registry (e.g, The California Immunization Registry) within 14 days of administration.