

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services
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CENTER for MEDICARE

TO: All Medicare Part D Plan Sponsors and Medicare Advantage Organizations

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DATE: August 16, 2010

SUBJECT: California Pertussis Outbreak

The California Department of Public Health (CDPH) has recently announced a significant increase in the state's pertussis (whooping cough) case rate. According to the CDPH, over 2,000 cases of pertussis have been reported in the state from January 1, 2010 through July 2010. This is up from 349 cases reported for the same period last year, and puts California on track to have the highest rate of pertussis in over 50 years. In response to the outbreak, the CDPH issued a recommendation for broader use of the pertussis booster vaccine (Tdap). In addition to the typical series of childhood pertussis immunizations, the CDPH now recommends the administration of the Tdap vaccine for children as young as seven years old and for California residents over 64 years of age for the duration of the epidemic.

CMS reminds Part D sponsors that the Tdap vaccine is a Part D covered drug and is on-compensated for use in patients 65 and older. The Tdap vaccine may be obtained from a network pharmacy and administered by a pharmacist registered for vaccine administration or in a network provider's office. This will benefit members by providing a choice in access and administration to the vaccine.

Vaccination of those over the age of 64 is important because neither prior vaccination nor natural disease confers life-long immunity and those over 64 years of age have increasingly become primary care givers for their grandchildren. Studies have demonstrated that pertussis is under-diagnosed in adults and may present with milder symptoms. In addition, the source of infection for infants under 3 months of age, those most likely to be hospitalized and die, is most commonly a household member or primary caregiver.

CMS encourages sponsors to inform their beneficiaries of this public health issue and encourage the benefits of immunization. If you have any questions regarding this guidance, please contact Keely Ireland at 410-786-7160 or keely.ireland@cms.hhs.gov.