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Whooping Cough Booster Shots Recommended for Middle-School Students

As kids get ready to return to classes, a whooping cough vaccination should be on the back-to-school list.

Public health and school officials urge middle-school students to get a whooping cough booster shot before the start of classes. While the vaccination is not required, it is highly encouraged in light of an increase in local cases of pertussis, a highly-contagious bacterial disease that causes severe coughing.

"Receiving the booster vaccination is an important tool to prevent the spread of whooping cough in our schools," said county Health Officer Dr. Eric Frykman.

The recommendation targets middle-school students age 10 to 12, who should have received the vaccination when they were younger and could benefit from a booster shot. Immunizations help prevent whooping cough outbreaks on school campuses, reducing absences and further spread in the community.

"As students prepare to head back to school, now is the time to help protect them," said Riverside County Superintendent of Schools Kenneth M. Young.

The California Department of Health declared a pertussis epidemic in June, with more than 1,496 cases and five deaths reported statewide. Riverside County has reported 53 cases to date.

Pertussis is highly contagious. Symptoms are similar to the common cold, but worsen over time and can last for two months. Anyone who suspects they have whooping cough should cover their coughs, wash their hands after coughing or sneezing, and stay home when sick. Infants and young children are at risk for serious complications from pertussis. All young children should be immunized against whooping cough and all other vaccinations should be updated.

The advisory is a joint effort between the county Department of Public Health and the Riverside County Superintendent of Schools. For more information on pertussis, visit <http://www.rivcoph.org/pertussis/>.

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