

December 7, 2012

Dear Chief Executive Officer:

This letter is to inform hospitals that on July 18, 2012, Governor Cuomo signed into law Chapter 215 of the laws of 2012 which amended New York State (NYS) Public Health Law (PHL) section 2805-h to require all general hospitals with newborn nurseries or obstetric services to offer and provide vaccination against *Bordetella pertussis* (whooping cough) to parents and anticipated caregivers of all newborns being treated in the hospital following their births. This requirement takes effect on January 14, 2013. Hospitals must take steps to adopt and implement this policy as required under law.

Pertussis is an acute infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Bordetella pertussis*. Pertussis is a highly communicable, vaccine-preventable disease that lasts for many weeks and typically manifests in children with paroxysmal spasms of severe coughing, whooping, and post-tussive vomiting. Major complications are most common among infants and young children and include apnea, pneumonia, seizures, encephalopathy, and death. Thus far in 2012, there have been 14 deaths reported in the United States (US). The majority of deaths occurred in infants less than 3 months of age.

Before the availability of pertussis vaccine in the 1940s, more than 200,000 cases of pertussis were reported annually in the US. Since widespread use of the vaccine began, incidence has decreased more than 80% compared with the pre-vaccine era. Due to the cyclical nature of the disease, increased recognition by clinicians, accessible laboratory diagnostics and waning immunity there has been an increase in the number of reported cases of pertussis. Pertussis activity has also increased in NYS. Final data for 2011 in NYS, outside of New York City, shows 928 probable and confirmed cases which included 3 infant deaths. Since January 1, 2012 the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) has been notified of over 2,000 cases of pertussis from throughout the state, including 163 cases in infants under the age of one.

By providing parents and caregivers of newborns with the opportunity to receive whooping cough vaccination while in the hospital, those infants receive some protection against this disease. The strategy of protecting infants from pertussis by vaccinating those in close contact with them is known as "cocooning". Cocooning enhances maternal vaccination to provide maximum protection to the infant. The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has recommended cocooning with Tdap vaccine since 2005 and continues to recommend this strategy for all those with expected close contact with newborns. This recommendation is also supported by many national professional medical organizations. We strongly encourage you to review your pertussis vaccine purchasing options and assess the needs of your newborn nurseries.

Should you need further assistance, please call the NYSDOH Bureau of Immunization at 518-473-4437.

Sincerely,

Guthrie S. Birkhead, M.D., M.P.H.  
Deputy Commissioner  
Office of Public Health