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## **No Shot, No School - Whooping Cough Booster Now Required**

*By Cathy Tyson*

Attention all students entering grades seven through twelve in the fall - or more likely their very responsible parents - California has a new law, AB 354, that requires students to be vaccinated against whooping cough, also called pertussis, before school starts this August. Commonly called Tdap, this one booster shot, protects against tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough. Parents may be familiar with the tetanus-diphtheria booster shot or "Td," but starting with the 2011 - 2012 school year, it doesn't meet the requirement.

Proof of Tdap immunization is required during the residency verification process in August for all California students, although some local schools are accepting proof now for those currently enrolled. Getting the vaccine now or during the summer months will help avoid the inevitable rush shortly before school starts.

"Your immunity wanes," says Dr. Sam Lewis, a pediatrician who practices in Orinda. "You still need a booster for two reasons, one - to keep kids from getting it and two - to keep from passing it on to little ones." He describes the symptoms as terrible and semi-serious, a choking, gagging cough for six to eight weeks. He recently had a one month old patient who ended up in Children's Hospital with whooping cough for almost a week.

Cases of whooping cough are on the rise in the U.S. According to the California Department of Public Health it's a highly contagious bacterial illness spread by coughs and sneezes. They reported 8,000 cases of pertussis in California in 2010, the most in over sixty years - including ten infants who died and hundreds more who were hospitalized.

You can't start school if you don't have proof of immunization. For more information, go to [www.shotsforschools.org](http://www.shotsforschools.org). For those without health insurance, help may be available via the Vaccines for Children Program, a federally funded and state operated program, information available on the shots for schools website. Children enrolled in California's Healthy Families plan receive free immunizations with no copayment.

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