

**TRANSCRIPT**  
**NBC “Today Show” – July 28, 2010**  
**Meredith Viera & Nancy Snyderman, MD**

**MEREDITH VIEIRA:** With a comeback of whooping cough, an outbreak has hit California, the worst in 50 years, nearly 1500 confirmed cases and at least six infants have died. Dr. Nancy Snyderman is NBC’s chief medical editor. Dr. Nancy, good morning to you. What is happening here?

**NANCY SNYDERMAN, MD:** I think what we are seeing here is a tipping point in unvaccinated children because the hot pockets are in families where, frankly, parents have under-vaccinated or decided not to vaccinate their children. In Marin county just north of San Francisco, there are more cases there than anywhere else. Now I should underscore, these are 6 infants who have lost their lives who, frankly, should not have died.

**VIEIRA:** And you say that vaccines have become victims of their own success. What do you mean by that?

**SNYDERMAN:** You and I remember what it was like in the 50’s and 60’s when we were just lined up in our cafeterias. We were given our polio vaccine and the idea was that if you get a vaccination, you will not get ill and you will not die. We had mass inoculations. And now people, frankly, have amnesia from the event. They forget what it was like to see people with these communicable diseases.

And I worry that, if we are under-vaccinating our children and you start to see things like whooping cough coming back, this is the canary in the coalmine. Last year we saw children die of measles and I worry that, if we see whooping cough and measles, that polio can’t be far away. And in a country like this, where vaccinations are available, these communicable and infectious and deadly diseases shouldn’t even be talked about.

**VIEIRA:** Well, the whooping cough season is just beginning, really, so we already have 1500 cases...

**SNYDERMAN:** August and September, we may see many more.

**VIEIRA:** So how do people protect themselves at this point?

**SNYDERMAN:** You know I have been an unabashed, unapologetic advocate for vaccinations. They are safe. They work. A lot of people are opting out on them and saying, “Well, it’s against my religion” and I would say, for most people, that is just not true.

Make sure your children are vaccinated. The whooping cough vaccine is given with pertussis at 2, 4 and 6 months. If you are an adult and you are around a child under the age of one, get vaccinated. If you are a woman of childbearing years, get vaccinated. If you are not sure, pull out that card that your pediatrician gives you and make sure you have it. There is a real vaccination schedule that you can get from the American Academy of Pediatrics or the CDC.

These vaccines are meant to protect your children and you. And if you think, well, you can opt out, remember that, when you go to the grocery store and you walk by someone who has cancer or MS or any other compromised immune system, you put that person in harms way, too.

There is a time, when the community as a whole, their needs are better than the individual and, I think, more important. And right now, individuals are trumping the general populace at large and I find that, frankly, offensive and amoral.

**VIEIRA:** And what are the symptoms if you suspect that your child or you have whooping cough? What do you do?

**SNYDERMAN:** It starts as a crummy little cold but, then, you get this whooping cough that can start two weeks later. It really may start as nothing more than a stuffy nose, sniffles, a cough, runny eyes but, then, two weeks later, you start to see the cough. And the problem is children then have to sort of fight to breathe. Children can sometimes breathe 50, 60 times a minute, sometimes higher and they, literally, when they die, end up suffocating themselves because they struggle for breath. I've seen several cases as a young pediatrician. It is a horrendous disease.

And any time we talk about something that can be prevented, I think we have to go back to basics. This is the time. Make sure your children are safe.

**VIERA:** Is it likely that this is going to spread to other states?

**SNYDERMAN:** Oh, I have no doubt that it's going to.....It's peaked in California. Last year, in Minnesota and in Philadelphia, we know children died of measles. I think this winter, as whooping cough upticks, measles continues to be under-vaccinated, we're going to increasingly see pockets of communicable infections that a few decades ago we thought, frankly, we had eradicated from the United States. These illnesses should not be seen in the United States with the vaccinations that we have at hand.

**VIEIRA:** All right, Dr. Nancy Synderman. Thank you so much.

**SNYDERMAN:** You bet, Meredith.