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PERTUSSIS VACCINATION IN PREGNANT WOMEN: PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES

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Pertussis vaccination has given an important contribution in reducing the incidence of the disease; however pertussis reawakens internationally, even in highly vaccinated population groups. This resurgence seems to be attributable to various reasons: Non-optimal efficacy of the vaccine; Rapid decay of protective antibody titers in part of the population and above all; Their inadequacy in preventing also vaccinated subjects from infections and transmission of the pathogen; Selective pressure of extensive vaccination with emergence of mutated resistant strains; Substantial impossibility of obtaining a herd effect with the vaccines available today. This work analyzes the state of scientific knowledge and illustrates some topics that may challenge prevention in more vulnerable infants, based on the so called cocoon strategy or on the vaccination of pregnant mothers, with a pertussis or a multicomponent vaccine. Public health strategies must be rethought, considering also different solutions that aim to fight the disease, particularly in this population at greater risk, in a more targeted and potentially effective way. The cocoon strategy leaves many problems open and does not seem effective. The currently recommended strategy is a universal vaccination of pregnant mothers, but the protection of the offspring seems modest, and adverse effects for the women and the offspring cannot yet be ruled out. Among the alternatives, public health services could also consider the experimentation of solutions less interfering with the bacterial ecology, that only aim at avoiding major damage to subgroups at greater risk; integrated with initiatives to improve surveillance systems, microbiological diagnosis/timely treatment and lifestyle-based prevention.