



INFORMATION

HPV Vaccine What Parents Need to Know

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Introduction

Fifty years ago the typical high school health-education class discussed two types of sexually transmitted infections (STIs): syphilis and gonorrhea. Now more than twenty significant diseases are known to be transmitted skin to skin or by exchange of body fluids during sexual activity. Approximately 18.9 million **new** cases of STIs occur each year, of which 9.1 million (48%) are among persons aged 15-24. In 2000, three STIs (human papillomavirus, trichomoniasis and chlamydia) accounted for 88% of all new cases in this age group.¹

What is Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is the most common STI in the United States, with approximately 20 million Americans infected.² According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), at least 50% of sexually active men and women will acquire HPV from an infected partner at some point in their lives.³ There are approximately 150 types of HPV with about 40 that are sexually transmitted.⁴ Most people who are infected with the virus have no symptoms, and the infection clears up without intervention. Other people, however, can develop genital warts and pre-cancerous changes in cells in their cervix, vulva, anus or penis. Still other infections progress to cancer in these and other areas. HPV is the primary cause of virtually all cervical cancers,⁵ and is implicated as a cause of as many as 30 to 50% of cancers arising from the mouth and throat.⁶ The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2012, more than 12,000 women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer and more than 4,200 women will die from the disease.⁷ In addition, about 35,000 new cases of mouth and throat cancer will be diagnosed in 2012, and roughly 6,800 will die from this disease. (This form of cancer occurs in about twice as many men as women.)⁸

How can this infection affect my children and teens?

Less than half of our high school youth have had sexual intercourse, yet intercourse seems to be the activity that we concentrate on most when talking to our children about living God's design for human sexuality. Our children may be involved in other activities that they don't commonly think of as "sexual." We must do all we can to help them understand that "**all sex is sex**" and capable of transmitting STIs. Our children and teens need to know that many forms of sex can transmit this potentially deadly virus.

- HPV is primarily transmitted from an infected person by skin-to-skin contact that involves genital touching.
- HPV can be transmitted by sexual intercourse.
- HPV can also be transmitted by oral sex.

What can you tell me about the HPV vaccine?

Vaccines to prevent HPV have been in development for many years and represent a tremendous breakthrough in science that will likely save hundreds of thousands of women's lives around the world. Two pharmaceutical manufacturers — GlaxoSmithKline and Merck — have developed HPV vaccines. GlaxoSmithKline's product (Cervarix) targets two types of the virus and is intended for women only. Merck's product (Gardasil) provides immunity for four types of HPV and is intended for use in both males and females. Currently, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved the use of Gardasil in females and males ages 9 through 26. Cervarix has been approved for use in girls ages 10 through 25.

What are the current recommendations for the HPV vaccines?

The CDC recommends that girls and boys 11 to 12 years-old be vaccinated against HPV. Proponents cite several reasons for giving this vaccine to pre-teens:

- It is easier to "catch" all 12-year-olds at their regularly scheduled physical when they receive other immunizations.
- The vaccine appears to be more effective when it's given at a young age.
- Immunization can provide an added measure of protection if given before someone becomes sexually active and has a chance of being exposed to HPV.

What else do I need to consider as a parent when deciding about this vaccine for my child?

- The HPV vaccine does not, in any circumstance, negate or substitute God's plan for sexuality, which is sexual abstinence until marriage and sexual faithfulness within marriage.
- Whether or not you decide to vaccinate your child, it is important to talk with him or her about this vaccine and about HPV as they will likely hear about them from their doctor, teacher, media and friends.
- No vaccine is 100% effective against infection or disease.
- There are more than one hundred types of HPV, and the current vaccines are effective against, at most, four types.
- The types of the virus that these vaccines protect against are the cause of most but not all cases of cervical cancer.
- HPV infection can result from non-consensual sex, including sexual assault and date rape.
- Young people may marry someone who is infected with HPV, thus putting themselves at risk for infection.
- The HPV vaccine **does not protect** against other STIs or prevent pregnancy.

See also our companion fact sheet "[Talking to Your Children About HPV Vaccine](#)" (FX451) and Focus on the Family's [position statement on Human Papillomavirus Vaccines](#) (MS006).

¹ Weinstock H., Berman, Stuart., Cates, W., "Sexually Transmitted Diseases among American Youth: Incidence and Prevalence Estimates, 2000," *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, vol. 36(2004).

² Cates W., Jr. "Estimates of the Incidence and Prevalence of Sexually Transmitted Diseases in the United States." American Social Health Association Panel. *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*, 1999; 26(4:Suppl):S2-S7.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Genital HPV Infection – CDC Fact Sheet*, <http://www.cdc.gov/std/HPV/STDFact-HPV.htm> (8 December 2005).

⁴ National Cancer Institute. Human Papillomaviruses and Cancer, <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/HPV>, accessed 10-21-11.

⁵ Walboomers J.M., Jacobs M.V., Manos M.M., et al. "Human Papillomavirus is a Necessary Cause of Invasive Cervical Cancer Worldwide." *J Pathology*. 1999; 189:12-19.

⁶ UpToDate: Robert I Haddad, MD, Human papillomavirus-associated head and neck cancer
Last literature review version 19.2: May 2011 | This topic last updated: March 24, 2011
<http://www.uptodate.com/contents/human-papillomavirus-associated-head-and-neck-cancer/abstract/6-9>

⁷ American Cancer Society: What are the key statistics about cervical cancer?
<http://www.cancer.org/Cancer/CervicalCancer/DetailedGuide/cervical-cancer-key-statistics>, accessed 2-16-12.

⁸ American Cancer Society: What are the key statistics about oral cavity and oropharyngeal cancers?
<http://www.cancer.org/Cancer/OralCavityandOropharyngealCancer/DetailedGuide/oral-cavity-and-oropharyngeal-cancer-key-statistics>, accessed 2-16-12.



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