



The Vaccine and HPV

The Facts behind the Commercials

Are you the parent of a girl or young woman between the ages of 9 and 26? With all the vaccine ads on television, are you asking, what is HPV? Are you wondering if your daughter needs the vaccine? This fact sheet will briefly answer some basic questions.

What is HPV?

HPV means Human Papillomavirus. The key to understanding HPV is the term *virus*, a part of the second word. Viruses are tiny germs that harm cells in the body to create an illness. Viruses cause many common human infections like the cold and flu. Viruses are also responsible for more rare diseases like AIDS.

How are viruses spread?

Some viruses are airborne viruses – carried through the air. Others are passed through indirect contact – transferred by touching a surface, like a doorknob. Or others, like HPV are passed from one person to another through sexual activity.

Will my daughter know she has HPV?

Some strains of HPV have no signs or symptoms so a person can have the virus and not know it. Other strains can lead to the development of genital warts. Once infected with the virus, the body *may* heal on its own. A young woman may never know she had the virus. There is no known treatment for HPV at this time.

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is abnormal cells on the lining of the cervix, the lower part of a woman's womb. It is the third most common type of cancer for women. The link between HPV and cervical cancer was discovered in 1986. The American Cancer Society estimated 3,700 women would die of cervical cancer in 2006.

How does the vaccine work?

The new vaccine is like all vaccines; it prevents illness. The vaccine is proven to be safe with limited side effects and protects young women from contracting most strains of HPV and developing cervical cancer caused by these strains. The vaccine is 100% effective against four strains of HPV which covers about 70% of the strains that causes cervical cancer and genital warts. *Since the vaccine is not 100% successful in stopping HPV and cervical cancer, women still need to have an annual Pap test after the age of 18 and practice safe sex.*

Why have girls and young women age 9 to 26 been selected to receive the vaccine?

To prevent illness, a person should receive the vaccine before there is a chance of developing HPV. Since HPV is passed during sexual activity, the vaccine should be given *before sexual activity begins*.

How is the vaccine given and how often?

It must be given by a health care provider who injects the vaccine into the patient's arm. Three doses are given over a six-month period and all three dosages must be given for it to be effective.

Does my health insurance pay for it?

Some health insurance companies are now paying for the vaccine. Check with your health care provider or local health department to learn more about options for receiving the vaccine.

This fact sheet is not meant to replace information provided by your health care provider.

For more information about cancer contact the American Cancer Society at 1-800-ACS-2345.