

HPV Vaccine: Help in Preventing Cancer in our Daughters!

Every year, about 12,000 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer. Almost 4,000 women die from this disease in the United States. The genital HPV virus can cause cervical cancer as well as cancers of the anus, vagina, and vulva.¹ Other types of HPV can also cause genital warts. But now there is a vaccine that can help prevent cancer in our daughters.

The HPV vaccine is a series of three shots that are recommended for girls from 11 through 26 years old who have not been vaccinated.² The vaccine is most effective for girls before they become sexually active.³ That is because the HPV virus is transmitted through sexual contact. It can only prevent HPV before a person gets it.

The vaccine series has been successfully tested in girls/women aged 9 through 26 years old and has been licensed by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration as an effective and safe vaccine. The three-shot vaccine series is highly effective in preventing the types of HPV that most commonly cause cervical cancer and genital warts. Studies have found no serious side effects. The most serious side effect is soreness in the arm where the shot is given. In a few cases, some teens fainted after getting the vaccine. So make sure that you and your daughter wait in the doctor's office for 15 minutes after getting the shot.

It does not prevent all cases of cervical cancer, so your daughter should still get her regular Pap tests.⁴

Most large health insurance plans, including Medicaid and New Jersey's Family Care (State Children's Health insurance Plan) cover the cost of the HPV vaccine in teenage girls. If your daughter is 18 and younger and uninsured, she may be able to get the vaccine through the Vaccines for Children program. Under the Vaccines for Children program, your doctor may charge a small fee to give each shot. But the vaccine cannot be denied to your child if you cannot afford the fee. You may also be able to get your daughter vaccinated at your local public health department.

If you have any questions about the HPV vaccine, you can go to www.cdc.org, the website of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. Other websites with good information include http://www.nccc-online.org/patient_info/vaccine.html, the website of the National Cervical Cancer Coalition, and <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/hpv-vaccines>, the website of the National Cancer Institute. You can also contact SPAN's Family to Family Health Information Center at 800-654-SPAN.

¹ The vulva is the area around the opening of the vagina.

² The vaccine series can also be given to girls as young as 9-10 years old.

³ The vaccine should not be used in girls who are pregnant.

⁴ The HPV vaccine also does not prevent other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).