

INFORMATION

from Focus on the Family

HPV Vaccine

What Parents Need to Know

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Introduction

Since the 1960s, the number of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) has risen from 2 to more than 25. The number of STIs continues to increase each year. 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 100 types of HPV with about 30 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. HPV is the primary cause of more than 99% of cervical cancers.⁵ The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2005, 10,370 women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer and 3,710 women will die from the disease.⁶

How can this infection effect 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." They should know 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 new HPV vaccine?

Vaccines to prevent HPV have been in development for many years and represent a tremendous breakthrough in science that will likely save millions 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. Approval from U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and a formal recommendation from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are necessary for these vaccines to be available to the public. To date, this approval has only been

granted for a limited use of Gardasil in females ages 9 through 26. Expansion of HPV vaccine approvals is expected in the future.

At what age are the manufacturers recommending people be immunized with this vaccine?

These vaccines are being targeted to 9 to 12 year-olds (although Gardasil is presently approved for use in females ages 9 to 26). 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 the virus thus putting themselves at risk for infection.
- The HPV vaccine **does not protect** against other STIs or prevent pregnancy.

Additional information about terminology

Medical terminology often changes and can be confusing. Years ago, the term Venereal Disease (VD) was used for sexually transmitted infections. After the 1960s, VD was changed to Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD). Today, the current terminology has changed to Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI).

The terminology has been changed from STD to STI to provide a more precise definition. These terms are not interchangeable. According to The Medical Institute the following definitions apply:

- **Sexually Transmitted Infection:** Invasion of and multiplication in bodily tissue by a microorganism (e.g., bacterium, virus, protozoan) that is usually (more than half the time) passed from one person to another during intimate bodily contact meant to give or derive sexual gratification.
- **Sexually Transmitted Disease:** Pathology (i.e., damage) with or without symptoms secondary to an infection that is usually (more than half the time) passed from one person to another during intimate bodily contact meant to give or derive sexual gratification.”⁷

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 Koutsky L.A., Kiviat N.B., “Genital Human Papillomavirus.” In: Holmes K.K., Mardh P.A., Sparling P.F., et al., eds. *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*. 3rd ed. New York, NY: McGraw Hill, Co; 1999: 347-359.

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 American Cancer Society. “2005 Facts and Figures.” <http://www.cancer.org/downloads/STT/CAFF2005f4PWSecured.pdf> (7 December 2005).

⁷ The Medical Institute, *Frequently Asked Questions*, http://www.medinstitute.org/health/questions_answers.html (9 January 2006).

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