

HPV VACCINE

For women younger than 40, cervical cancer is among the leading causes of cancer-related death. With modern vaccines to protect against the underlying cause, human papilloma virus (HPV), cervical cancer is also one of the most preventable types of cancers.

As a society, we have the opportunity to wipe out or significantly reduce a disease by vaccinating the population. Still, many American health care providers and families aren't getting their children and teens vaccinated, and our youth are suffering the consequences.

HPV a cause

Cervical cancer, as well as cancers of the throat, penis, rectum, vulva and mouth, can develop from changes in cells caused by HPV. Since the FDA approved the first versions of the HPV vaccine in 2006, nearly 7 billion doses have been administered worldwide. HPV continues to spread because of a national resistance to accepting the vaccine as part of standard preventive care.

Because of social stigmas surrounding HPV vaccinations, only around 30 percent of men and women under the age of 25 have been vaccinated in both Kentucky and nationwide. Only 27 percent of women between the ages 13 to 17 have received the recommended dosages of the HPV vaccine.

Many health care providers and parents view these vaccinations as elective or irrelevant unless a youth is sexually active. In reality, HPV can be transmitted a number of ways, including from a mother to a child during delivery. Statistics show most people will contract one form of the virus at some point in their lives.

Vaccination options

Until 2014, the two vaccination options were Gardasil 4 and Cervarix, both of which protect against HPV strains 16 and 18 or the strains responsible for 70 percent of cervical cancers and Gardasil 4 also protects against 90 percent of genital warts (Strains 6 & 11). Last year, Gardasil 9 entered the market targeting strains 16 and 18, as well as five additional strains, covering HPV types responsible for almost 90 percent of cervical cancers. The vaccine also protects against HPV strains 6 and 11, which cause genital warts.

Parents and adolescent providers must seize the opportunity to vaccinate their youth before infection occurs. Countries that provided massive free vaccination such as Australia have experienced a 70 percent drop in cervical cancer rates, as well as other cancers associated with HPV.

Ask about the HPV vaccine

Next time you visit your pediatrician or adolescent health provider, insist on

including an HPV vaccine in your child's preventive health care plan. Both boys and girls should be vaccinated. The vaccine is safe and effective, and prevents 70 to 90 percent of the disease. As a parent, doing everything in your capacity to protect your child from harm means making the decision to get the HPV vaccine — the only certain way to prevent these forms of cancer.