

Riley Speaks

Human Papillomavirus and Gardasil Vaccine

There is a vaccine — called Gardasil® — that protects against the types of HPV infections that cause most cervical cancers and genital warts. As a parent, you may have questions about HPV and Gardasil®. Here are important facts about human papillomavirus and the HPV vaccine to help you make an informed decision.

WHAT IS HPV AND HOW COMMON IS IT?

Human papillomavirus, or HPV, is a virus with more than 100 related types. Some of these viral types cause warts on the hands, feet or genitals. About 40 types of the viral types infect the genital area in both women and men. High-risk types of the virus can lead to cervical and other cancers.

Every year, more than 6 million people in the United States contract an HPV infection. Nearly half of these infections are in adolescents and young adults between 15 and 25 years old who have had sexual intercourse.

IS HPV DANGEROUS?

Most types of HPV cause no symptoms and will go away on their own. But some types can cause cervical precancer, cervical cancer and other genital cancers. Cervical cancer is one of the most common cancers in women, with about 10,000 women developing the disease every year in the U.S. — and 4,000 dying from it. Many more women will have precancerous lesions detected on a Pap smear.

HOW IS HPV ACQUIRED?

Genital HPV infections are passed from one person to another through genital contact, most often during sex. These infections often include those HPV types that cause cervical cancer.

WHAT'S THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HPV AND CANCER?

Two types of genital HPV — known as types 16 and 18 — are responsible for 70 percent of cervical cancers and more than half of other genital cancers.

While HPV is necessary for genital cancers, it doesn't cause cancer by itself. Other risk factors — including a suppressed immune system, smoking, high-risk sexual behavior or infection with a high-risk type of HPV — greatly affect whether or not a person with HPV will develop cancer.

WHAT IS THE HPV VACCINE AND WHAT DOES IT PROTECT AGAINST?

Gardasil® is the name of an HPV vaccine that was approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration in 2006 and recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Gardasil® protects against four types of HPV — including two types that cause genital warts and two types (16 and 18) that cause most cervical cancers.



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WHO SHOULD GET VACCINATED AND WHEN?

Vaccination before girls becomes sexually active is optimal in protecting them against HPV viruses that are known to cause cervical cancer. Gardasil is recommended for girls ages 11 and 12. It also can be given as early as 9 and as late as 26.

The vaccine is a three-dose series — with the second shot given two months after the first shot and the third one given six months after the first shot.

IS THE VACCINATION SAFE?

Yes. The HPV vaccine is made using only a single protein (that will not cause infection) from each type of the virus. The vaccine can't cause HPV disease or cervical cancer. Side effects may include redness, tenderness or a little bit of swelling at the injection site.

WHAT SHOULD I DO AS A PARENT?

Talk with your child's doctor and get the facts about human papillomavirus and the HPV vaccine. Vaccination has successfully prevented HPV infections that cause cervical cancer.



For more information, visit rileyhospital.org.



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