HPV

also known as *Human Papillomavirus*

As parents, you do everything you can to protect your children's health for now and for the future. Today, there is a strong weapon to prevent several types of cancer in our kids: the HPV vaccine.

HPV and Cancer

HPV is short for Human Papillomavirus, a common virus. In the United States each year, there are about 17,000 women and 9,000 men affected by HPV-related cancers. Many of these cancers **could be prevented with vaccination.** In both women and men, HPV can cause anal cancer and mouth/throat (oropharyngeal) cancer. It can also cause cancers of the cervix, vulva and vagina in women; and cancer of the penis in men.

For women, screening is available to detect most cases of cervical cancer with a Pap smear. Unfortunately, there is no routine screening for other HPV-related cancers for women or men, and these cancers can cause pain, suffering, or even death. **That is why a vaccine that prevents most of these types of cancers is so important.**

More about HPV

HPV is a virus passed from one person to another during skin-to-skin sexual contact, including vaginal, oral, and anal sex. HPV is most common in people in their late teens and early 20s. Almost all sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives, though most will never even know it.

Most of the time, the body naturally fights off HPV, before HPV causes any health problems. But in some cases, the body does not fight off HPV, and HPV can cause health problems, like cancer and genital warts. Genital warts are not a life-threatening disease, but they can cause emotional stress, and their treatment can be very uncomfortable. About 1 in 100 sexually active adults in the United States have genital warts at any given time.

HPV vaccination is recommended for preteen girls and boys at age 11 or 12 years

HPV vaccine is also recommended for girls ages 13 through 26 years and for boys ages 13 through 21 years, who have not yet been vaccinated. So if your son or daughter hasn't started or finished the HPV vaccine series—**it's not too late!** Talk to their doctor about getting it for them now.

Two vaccines—Cervarix and Gardasil—are available to prevent the HPV types that cause most cervical cancers and anal cancers. One of the HPV vaccines, Gardasil, also prevents vulvar and vaginal cancers in women and genital warts in both women and men. Only Gardasil has been tested and licensed for use in males. Both vaccines are given in a series of 3 shots over 6 months. The best way to remember to get your child all three shots is to make an appointment for the second and third shot before you leave the doctor's office after the first shot.

Is the HPV vaccine safe?

Yes. Both HPV vaccines were studied in tens of thousands of people around the world. More than 57 million doses have been distributed to date, and there have been no serious safety concerns. Vaccine safety continues to be monitored by CDC and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). **These studies continue to show that HPV vaccines are safe.**

The most common side effects reported are mild. They include: pain where the shot was given (usually the arm), fever, dizziness, and nausea.

Why does my child need this now?

HPV vaccines offer the best protection to girls and boys who receive all three vaccine doses and have time to develop an immune response **before** they begin sexual activity with another person. This is not to say that your preteen is ready to have sex. In fact, it's just the opposite—it's important to get your child protected before you or your child have to think about this issue. The immune response to this vaccine is better in preteens, and this could mean better protection for your child.

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You may have heard that some kids faint when they get vaccinated. Fainting is common with preteens and teens for many medical procedures, not just the HPV shot. Be sure that your child eats something before going to get the vaccine. It's a good idea to have your child sit or lay down while getting any vaccine, and for 15 minutes afterwards, to prevent fainting and any injuries that could happen from fainting.

The HPV vaccine can safely be given at the same time as the other recommended vaccines, including the Tdap, meningococcal, and influenza vaccines. Learn more about all of the recommended preteen vaccines at **www.cdc.gov/vaccines/teens**

Help paying for vaccines

The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program provides vaccines for children ages 18 years and younger who are under-insured, not insured, Medicaid-eligible, or American Indian/Alaska Native. Learn more about the VFC program at **www.cdc.gov/Features/VFCprogram/**

Whether you have insurance, or your child is VFC-eligible, some doctors' offices may also charge a fee to give the vaccines.

Jacquelyn's story: "I was healthy—and got cervical cancer."

When I was in my late 20's and early 30's, in the years before my daughter was born, I had some abnormal Pap smears and had to have further testing. I was told I had the kind of HPV that can cause cancer and mild dysplasia.

For three more years, I had normal tests. But when I got my first Pap test after my son was born, they told me I needed a biopsy. The results came back as cancer, and my doctor sent me to an oncologist. Fortunately, the cancer was at an early stage. My lymph nodes were clear, and I didn't need radiation. But I did need to have a total hysterectomy.

My husband and I have been together for 15 years, and we were planning to have more children. We are so grateful for our two wonderful children, but we were hoping for more—which is not going to happen now.

The bottom line is they caught the cancer early, but the complications continue to impact my life and my family. For the next few years, I have to get pelvic exams and Pap smears every few months, the doctors measure tumor markers, and I have to have regular x-rays and ultrasounds, just in case. I have so many medical appointments that are taking time away from my family, my friends, and my job.

Worse, every time the phone rings, and I know it's my oncologist calling, I hold my breath until I get the results. I'm hopeful I can live a full and healthy life, but cancer is always in the back of my mind.

In a short period of time, I went from being healthy and planning more children to all of a sudden having a radical hysterectomy and trying to make sure I don't have cancer again. It's kind of overwhelming. And I am one of the lucky ones!

Ultimately I need to make sure I'm healthy and there for my children. I want to be around to see their children grow up.

I will do everything to keep my son and daughter from going through this. I will get them both the HPV vaccine as soon as they turn 11. I tell everyone—my friends, my family—to get their children the HPV vaccine series to protect them from this kind of cancer.

What about boys?

One HPV vaccine—Gardasil—is for boys too! This vaccine can help prevent boys from getting HPV-related cancers of the mouth/throat, penis and anus. The vaccine can also help prevent genital warts. HPV vaccination of males is also likely to benefit females by reducing the spread of HPV viruses.

Learn more about HPV and HPV vaccine at **www.cdc.gov/hpv**

For more information about the vaccines recommended for preteens and teens:
800-CDC-INFO *(800-232-4636)*
http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/teens