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What is Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?

Parent Information Fact Sheet

Who should get this vaccine?
This vaccine is recommended for 11-12 year-old girls. The vaccine can be given to girls as young as 9 years old, at the discretion (judgment) of the healthcare provider. The vaccine is also recommended for 13-26 year-old girls/women who have not yet received or completed the vaccine series. These recommendations were made by the federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP)—a national group of leading experts, which advises the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) on vaccine issues. The ACIP decides whether vaccines should be recommended, and if so, who should get them, and at what ages.

How effective is this vaccine?
The vaccine has mainly been studied in young women who had not been exposed to any of the four vaccine HPV types. These studies found the vaccine to be 100% effective in preventing cervical precancers caused by the vaccine HPV types. These studies also found it to be almost 100% effective in preventing precancers of the vulva and vagina, and genital warts that are caused by the vaccine HPV types. The vaccine was less effective in young women who had already been exposed to a vaccine HPV type. This vaccine does not treat existing HPV, genital warts, precancers or cancers.

Will sexually active females benefit from the vaccine?
Females who are sexually active may also benefit from the vaccine. But they may get less benefit from the vaccine since they may have already acquired one or more vaccine HPV type(s). Still, they would get protection against the vaccine HPV types they have not yet acquired. Few young women are infected with all four vaccine HPV types. Currently, there is no test available to tell whether a girl/woman has had any or all of the four vaccine HPV types.

How and when is the vaccine delivered?
The vaccine is given through a series of three injections over a six-month period. The second and third doses should be given two and six months (respectively) after the first dose.

Is the HPV vaccine safe?
The FDA has approved the HPV vaccine as safe and effective. This vaccine has been tested in over 11,000 females (ages 9-26 years) in many countries around the world. These studies have shown no serious side effects. The most common side effect is soreness at the injection site.

Does this vaccine contain thimerosal or mercury?
No. There is no thimerosal or mercury in the HPV vaccine. It is made up of proteins from the outer coat of the virus (HPV). There is no infectious material in this vaccine.

How much will the HPV vaccine cost?
The retail price of the vaccine is approximately $120 per dose ($360 for full series). **Wyoming WyVIP will be adding this vaccine to its currently available vaccine list in early 2007 for females ages 11-12 at no cost for the vaccine.**

Will girls/women who have been vaccinated still need cervical cancer screening?
Yes. There are three reasons why women will still need regular cervical cancer screening. First, the vaccine will NOT provide protection against all types of HPV that cause cervical cancer, so vaccinated women will still be at risk for some cancers. Second, some women may not get all required doses of the vaccine (or they may not get them at the right times), so they may not get the vaccine's full benefits. Third, women may not get the full benefit of the vaccine if they receive it after they've already acquired a vaccine HPV type.

Will the HPV vaccine be covered by insurance plans?
While some insurance companies may cover the vaccine, others may not. Most large group insurance plans usually cover the costs of recommended vaccines. However, there is often a short lag-time after a vaccine is recommended, before it is available and covered by health plans.

What kind of government programs may be available to cover HPV vaccine?
The WyVIP program provides free vaccines to children and adolescents less than 19 years of age. All Wyoming 11-12 year old female residents will have HPV available.

How is HPV related to cervical cancer?
Some types of HPV can infect a woman's cervix (lower part of the womb) and cause the cells to change. Most of the time, HPV goes away on its own. When HPV is gone, the cervix cells go back to normal. But sometimes, HPV does not go away. Instead, it lingers (persists) and continues to change the cells on a woman's cervix. These cell changes can lead to cancer over time, if they are not treated.

Are there other ways to prevent cervical cancer?
Regular Pap tests and follow-up can prevent most, but not all, cases of cervical cancer. Pap tests can detect cell changes (or "precancers") in the cervix *before* they turn into cancer. Pap tests can also detect most, but not all, cervical cancers at an early, curable stage. Most women diagnosed with cervical cancer in the U.S. have either never had a Pap test, or not had a Pap test in the last 5 years.

There is also an HPV DNA test available for use with the Pap test, as part of cervical cancer screening. This test is used for women over 30 or for women who get an unclear (borderline) Pap test result. While this test can tell if a woman has HPV on her cervix, it cannot tell *which* types of HPV she has.

Other Questions about the HPV Vaccine

What HPV types does the vaccine protect against?
The new HPV vaccine protects against the two HPV types that cause most (70%) cervical cancers (types 16 and 18), and the two HPV types that cause most (90%) genital warts (types 6 and 11).

What does the vaccine *not* protect against?
Because the vaccine does not protect against *all* types of HPV, it will not prevent all cases of cervical cancer or genital warts. About 30% of cervical cancers will *not* be prevented by the vaccine, so it will be important for women to continue getting screened for cervical cancer (regular Pap tests). Also, the vaccine does *not* prevent about 10% of genital warts—nor will it prevent other STIs— so it will still be important for sexually active adults to reduce exposure to HPV and other STIs.

How long does vaccine protection last? Will a booster shot be needed?
The length of vaccine protection (immunity) is usually not known when a vaccine is first introduced. So far, studies have followed women for five years and found that they are protected. More research is being done to find out how long protection will last, and if a booster vaccine is needed years later.

Will girls/women be protected against HPV and related diseases, even if they don't get all three doses?
It is not yet known how much protection girls/women would get from receiving only one or two doses of the vaccine. For this reason, it is very important that girls/women get *all three doses* of the vaccine.

Are there other ways to prevent HPV?
The only sure way to prevent HPV is to abstain from all sexual activity. Sexually active adults can reduce their risk by being in a mutually faithful relationship with someone who has had no other or few sex partners, or by limiting their number of sex partners. But even persons with only one lifetime sex partner can get HPV, if their partner has had previous partners.

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