

Great News in the Battle Against Cervical Cancer!

by Monica Hamburg, MD



Fear of vaccines has been a challenge for doctors since the introduction of smallpox vaccine in the 1800's.

When polio vaccine was invented in the 1950's many were distrustful.

In the 1970's there was great concern about the safety of DPT vaccine leading to epidemics of pertussis (whooping cough.)

In 1998, a small and fraudulent study lead to fears about MMR vaccine and measles epidemics occurred, especially in Europe.

Smallpox, polio, measles are among many diseases eliminated by safe vaccines.

Today, despite extensive review and confirmation of HPV vaccine safety and effectiveness, vaccine fears have landed on this vaccine.

We hope our parents can see past internet pseudoscience on this issue and protect their preteens and teenagers!

Doug Puder, MD

While we've been vaccinating with the HPV vaccine (*Gardasil*) for a full decade now, no one knew for sure what the impact on cervical and other cancers would be. A recently completed study brings us wonderful news! This study in the journal *Pediatrics* has found that the number of girls aged 14-19 infected with HPV has been reduced by about two-thirds (63% to be exact!). This means it's really helping! This decrease has occurred with only about 40% of girls receiving the vaccine at this time.

Human papilloma virus, HPV, is the leading cause of cervical cancer and the virus that *Gardasil* combats. In 2011 a total of 12,000 women developed cervical cancer in the US, and 4000 died from it. HPV also causes 7,000 cases per year of cancer in men, so the CDC also recommends vaccinating boys with HPV vaccine. About 14 million Americans become infected with HPV every year, males and females. Some strains cause genital warts as well as cervical, anal, penile, mouth and throat cancers.

Another exciting advancement in cancer prevention is the recent release of *Gardasil-9* vaccine which protects against five additional strains of the virus. Previous vaccines covered the 4 deadliest strains of HPV. In December, 2014 this new vaccine was approved by the FDA and we have begun using it in our office.

With vaccination we are hoping to greatly reduce the burden of these cancers. So if you haven't already, **now** is the best time to vaccinate your child age eleven or older against this deadly disease.

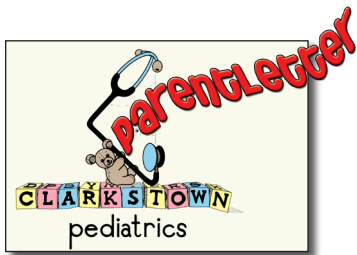
Why have only 40% of girls received the vaccine in the US? The vaccine is mandatory and free in some other countries, leading to a 92% vaccination rate in Australia, for example. While HPV vaccine is mandatory in the states of Rhode Island, Virginia and DC, it is optional in New York.

So why isn't everyone accepting the vaccine? Part of this may be the connection some people make to sexual activity. Yes, HPV is a sexually transmitted virus. But did you know that prior to HPV vaccine half of adults in this country were infected with this virus? It is therefore extremely important to protect your child now.

Why do we give it so young? The current recommendation is to vaccinate at age 11 or 12 when your child's immune response is more robust than at later ages and hopefully prior to any sexual activity.

Is it safe? The vaccine has been given routinely in this country for ten years and has been found to be both safe and effective. There have been over 178 million doses given worldwide! The most common side effect we have seen is fainting after receiving the vaccine, which is why we sometimes recommend your child sit for 10-15 min after receiving it.

Why does the anti-vaccine movement go crazy over this vaccine? Auto-immune fears, ovarian failure fears, sexual promiscuity fears have been carefully studied and disproven. The vaccine is safe!



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