Questions & Answers for Parents of Pre-teens about Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and the HPV Vaccine

What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a common virus that is spread through sexual contact. Most of the time HPV has no symptoms so people do not know they have it. There are many different strains or types of HPV. Some types can cause cervical cancer in women and can also cause other kinds of cancer in both men and women. Other types of HPV can cause genital warts in both males and females.

In most people, HPV goes away on its own without any treatment and does not cause health problems. Experts do not know why HPV goes away in some cases, but not in others.

How common is HPV?

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States, with about 20 million people currently infected. Your daughter has an 80 percent chance of getting HPV by the time she is 50. Every year in the U.S., about 6.2 million people get a new HPV infection. HPV is most common in young people who are in their late teens and early 20s.

How common is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer is a serious health problem in the United States. The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2007, over 11,000 women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer and approximately 3,600 will die from it in the U.S.

What is the HPV vaccine?

This vaccine is the first vaccine developed to prevent cervical cancer and genital warts due to HPV. It works by protecting against the types of HPV that most commonly cause these diseases. The vaccine is given in 3-doses.

Who should get the HPV vaccine?

Doctors recommend this vaccine for 11 and 12 year old girls. If your teenage daughter missed getting this vaccine when she was 11 or 12, make an appointment for her to get it now.

Ideally, girls should get this vaccine before their first sexual contact when they could be exposed to HPV. This is because the vaccine prevents disease in girls/women who have not previously gotten one or more types of HPV prevented by the vaccine. It does not work as well for those who were exposed to the virus before getting the vaccine.

continued on back

For more information on vaccines, ask your child's healthcare provider or call 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)
Website: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/preteen/

Is the HPV vaccine effective?

This vaccine targets types of HPV that most commonly cause cervical cancer and genital warts. This vaccine is highly effective in preventing these types of HPV in young women who have not been previously exposed to them. The vaccine will not treat existing diseases or conditions caused by HPV.

Is the HPV vaccine safe?

The vaccine has been licensed as safe. Before it was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the vaccine was studied in thousands of girls and women in the U.S. and around the world. These studies have shown no serious side effects. The most common side effect is soreness where the shot is given (in the arm).

Are there other ways, besides the vaccine, to prevent HPV?

The surest way to prevent genital HPV is to avoid sexual contact. For persons who are sexually active, condoms may lower their chances of getting HPV, if used all the time and the right way. Condoms may lower a person's chances of developing genital warts and cervical cancer. But HPV can infect areas that are not covered by a condom—so condoms may not fully protect against HPV.

Will girls/women be protected against HPV and related diseases, even if they don't get all three doses of the vaccine?

The HPV vaccine is recommended as a 3-dose vaccine. It is not yet known how much protection girls/women would get if they receive 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.

Will the girls/women who have been vaccinated still need a Pap test, also called "cervical cancer screening"?

Yes, they will still need to see their healthcare provider for a Pap test. Regular Pap tests are recommended for all women starting within three years of when a girl/woman begins sexual activity or at age 21, whichever comes first. The vaccine will not provide protection against all types of HPV that cause cervical cancer, so women will still be at risk for some cancers.

Why is the vaccine only recommended for girls/women 9 through 26 years old?

The vaccine has been widely tested in 9 through 26 year old females. But research on how well the vaccine works in older women has just recently begun. The FDA may consider licensing the vaccine for these women when there is research to show it is safe and effective for them.

What about vaccinating boys?

We do not yet know if the vaccine is effective in boys or men. Studies are being done to find out if the vaccine is effective in males. When more information is available, this vaccine may be licensed and recommended for boys/men as well.

CS112269

For more information on vaccines,
ask your child's healthcare provider
or call 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)
Website: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/preteen/

Department of Health and Human Services
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

CDC
SAFER·HEALTHIER·PEOPLE™