For Caregivers: Understanding HPV and the HPV Vaccine?

What is HPV?



Human papillomavirus (HPV) is an infection spread through sexual and skin-to-skin contact.

There are more than 100 types of HPV, some of which can cause warts on the hands, feet, face, and genitals. Other strains of HPV can lead to anal, cervical, vulvar, vaginal, penile, and throat cancers. However, many people who contract HPV do not experience any symptoms and may not know they have it.

Anybody can get HPV, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, or gender. It's a very common infection: An estimated 43 million people in the United States are currently infected with HPV. About 13 million people in the United States, including teenagers, are diagnosed with HPV each year.

Protecting Your Child from HPV and Cancers Caused by HPV

You can reduce your child's risk of getting HPV and its most serious potential effects, like cancer, by getting them vaccinated. The HPV vaccine is available to all people ages 9-26 and some people ages 27-45, regardless of sex, sexual orientation, or gender. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that children receive their first dose of the vaccine at between ages 9 and 12. **The vaccine is most effective if your child receives it before they become sexually active.**

The HPV vaccine can prevent more than 90% of cancers that are caused by an HPV infection. Like all vaccines, the HPV vaccine is also continuously monitored by health agencies and experts through various reporting systems, safety assessments, and collaborations with other government agencies and non-government partners. Through this monitoring, researchers have found that the vaccine provides a consistent rate of protection for 12 years or longer following vaccination. Currently, there is no recommendation for a booster vaccination once the initial series is completed.

Nearly everyone who isn't vaccinated against HPV will get the infection at some point in their lives. While getting the vaccine doesn't guarantee that you won't get HPV, it significantly reduces your risk of HPV infection and the cancers that can be caused by HPV.

Source: HPV (Human Papillomavirus) | American Cancer Society

Common Falsehoods About the HPV Vaccine

False claims that spread online about the HPV vaccine causing infertility, high-risk sexual behavior, and other adverse effects understandably create concern among parents and other caregivers, despite a lack of evidence.

Getting the HPV vaccine may cause mild symptoms, including nausea, headache, fever, and pain and swelling at the site where the shot was given. However:

- There are no data that support a link between the HPV vaccine and infertility. Treatment for cancers caused by HPV, on the other hand, can cause infertility.
- There are no data that support a link between the HPV vaccine and high-risk sexual behavior.
- There are no data that suggest that the HPV vaccine causes neurological disorders, increased risk of blood clots, or complex regional pain syndrome.

Next Steps

Talk to a healthcare provider about any questions you have about HPV and the HPV vaccine. If your child is at least age 9 and hasn't yet received the HPV vaccine, consider scheduling a vaccine appointment with a healthcare provider.

Sources

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