

## HPV Vaccine: A Tool for Cancer Prevention

**W**orking with the Centers for Disease Control's (CDC) Healthy People 2020 campaign, Wisconsin Comprehensive Cancer Control Program has made increasing HPV vaccine utilization and surveillance in Wisconsin a priority.

### What's the link between HPV and cancer?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) infection is very common, especially among young adults. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 79 million Americans are currently infected with HPV, with 14 million newly infected each year. While most HPV infections clear within one to two years, persistent infections can progress to pre-cancer or cancer. Almost all cervical and anal cancers and the majority of back of the throat cancers are caused by two types of HPV, known as 16 and 18. According to the CDC, in the U.S. 91 percent of cervical and anal cancers, 75 percent of vaginal, 72 percent of throat, 69 percent of vulva and 63 percent of penile cancers were attributed to HPV infection. From 2006-2010, 2,028 newly diagnosed cancer cases were attributed to HPV infection in Wisconsin. During this same time period, an estimated 534 cancer deaths are attributed to HPV infection.

### How does the HPV vaccine work?

To be fully vaccinated against HPV infection, patients need to complete three doses of the HPV vaccine, ideally over a six-month period. 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 becoming sexually active. Initiation of HPV vaccination is ideally recommended for girls and boys starting at 11 - 12 years of age, but is also recommended for girls, ages 13 - 26 and for boys, ages 13 - 21 who have not yet been vaccinated.

The first HPV vaccine was approved for use in females in 2006 and for use in males in 2009. Since then, vaccine coverage in Wisconsin is far less than that for other vaccines administered to adolescents. In December 2013, only 34 percent of Wisconsin females and 11 percent of Wisconsin males were completely vaccinated against HPV infections compared to 92 percent who received the school required Diphtheria/Tetanus/Pertussis vaccine.

Strong physician recommendation, as well as parent and patient education are essential to improving HPV vaccine coverage for males and females living in Wisconsin.

### How have health professionals become engaged in promoting the HPV vaccine?

A HPV Vaccine Summit held on June 16, 2014 brought together advocates, health care providers and public health professionals from around the state to activate HPV vaccine champions across Wisconsin. Doctor recommendation is the strongest predictor of whether an adolescent gets the HPV vaccine. Doctors and other health care providers need to embrace every opportunity to vaccinate their patients. For many patients, it's easier than ever to get the HPV vaccine. Because of the Affordable Care Act, most private health insurance plans will cover the HPV vaccine with no co-pay or deductible. In addition, the Vaccines for Children program provides vaccines for children 18 and younger who are under-insured, not insured, Medicaid-eligible or American Indian/Alaska Native.

To provide the best protection against potential HPV-related cancers, children need to be vaccinated before sexual activity and while the immune system is most responsive. As such, providers need to help parents recognize the importance of vaccinating their child by early pubescence.

By increasing the use of the HPV vaccine as a cancer prevention vaccine, Wisconsin citizens lower rates for some of the deadliest forms of this disease while promoting healthy choices for Wisconsin's children.



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