

Dear Parent or Guardian:

The following information is being provided to you at the direction of the Washington State Legislature to help reduce cervical cancer rates in Washington by protecting girls from HPV.

What is Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a very common virus that is spread through genital contact. At least 50 percent of sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives. There are many types of HPV. Some types can cause cervical cancer or genital warts. Both women and men can get HPV and easily spread it to others without knowing they have it.

What are the symptoms of HPV?

Most people with HPV have no signs or symptoms. Some people know they have HPV because they have a symptom like genital warts. Women may find out they have HPV through cervical cancer screening (Pap tests) and HPV testing. Health care providers do not usually test for HPV unless abnormal cervical cell changes are detected by a Pap test.

How can HPV infection be prevented?

The most effective way to prevent HPV infection is to abstain from all sexual activity. People with only one lifetime partner can get HPV if their partner had previous sexual partners. It is uncertain how well condoms protect against HPV infection. However, condom users do have lower cervical cancer rates. The HPV vaccine is a very effective way to prevent four types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer and genital warts.

What is the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine, Gardasil[®], protects against four types of HPV which cause 70 percent of cervical cancers and 90 percent of genital warts. The vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV or other sexually transmitted infections. The vaccine also does not protect against any type of HPV that someone already has. Current studies show that HPV vaccine protection lasts up to 5 years. Researchers will continue to study how long the vaccine provides protection.

Who should get the vaccine and when should they get it?

The federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends the HPV vaccine for all girls age 11-12 years. The vaccine can also be given to females as young as nine and up to 26 years, if their doctor recommends it. HPV vaccine is given as a series of three shots over a six month period. The vaccine is not currently recommended for boys or men. The HPV vaccine is a preventive vaccine and will offer the best protection if given before sexual activity starts. *HPV vaccine is not required for school entry in Washington.*

Are Pap tests still recommended for females that get the HPV vaccine?

Yes. The HPV vaccine does not protect against all of the types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer, so females will still need Pap tests.

Where can I find the HPV vaccine?

Ask your doctor, nurse, or local health clinic to find out whether your daughter needs the HPV vaccine and where you can get it.

For more information on HPV, the vaccine, and cervical cancer, check the following websites:

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention www.cdc.gov/std/hpv

Washington Dept. of Health www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/immunize/documents/hpvvaccinefactsheet.pdf

American Social Health Association www.ashastd.org

American Cancer Society www.cancer.org