

## HPV & Cancer

HPV is a virus that has been linked to many different types of cancer. The good news is there are vaccines available to protect against HPV and reduce your cancer risk.

### The cancer connection

Almost all cervical cancers are linked to the human papillomavirus, or HPV. The virus is also linked to at least five other types of cancer including vulvar, vaginal, penile and anal cancers, as well as oropharyngeal cancer, a cancer of the back of the throat, including the base of the tongue and tonsils. A person who is infected with HPV may not develop cancer for many years after becoming infected and it is impossible to know who will get cancer from HPV.<sup>1</sup>

### The virus

HPV is a very common virus; nearly 80 million people (about one in four) are currently infected in the United States.<sup>2</sup> It is so common that nearly all sexually active men and women get one of the many types of the virus at some point. HPV is spread through vaginal, anal or oral sex and you can contract it from an infected person who has no symptoms.

### Cancer prevention

Fortunately, a vaccine exists to protect against HPV-related cancers. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends *all* boys and girls 11-12 years old get **two doses** of the HPV vaccine to protect against cancers caused by HPV. The second dose should be given 6-12 months after the first dose. Teens and young adults who start the series later, at age 15 or older, will need **three doses** of the HPV vaccine.<sup>3</sup>

The HPV vaccine offers the best protection to girls and boys who complete the series and have time to develop an immune response *before* they become sexually active.<sup>4</sup>

The HPV vaccine is also available for young women through age 26 and most young men through age 21. It is important that women who have been vaccinated continue to have regular Pap tests to screen for cervical cancer.

If your health insurance does not cover the cost of the HPV vaccine, there are assistance programs available. Most HPV vaccines are covered by the Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program, a federal-funded program that helps provide vaccines to children (age 18 or younger) whose parents or guardians may not be able to afford them. Some HPV manufacturers also offer patient assistance programs to cover vaccine costs for adults ages 19 to 26.

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### Did you know?

- Every year, nearly 40,000 HPV-associated cancers occur in the U.S. About 23,000 are in women and 16,500 are in men.<sup>5</sup>
- Every year, more than 12,000 women in the U.S. are diagnosed with cervical cancer.<sup>6</sup> 90 percent of cervical and anal cancers are caused by HPV.<sup>7</sup>
- Every year, more than 13,000 men in the U.S. are diagnosed with oropharyngeal cancer.<sup>8</sup> 70 percent of oropharyngeal cancers are caused by HPV.<sup>9</sup>
- 70 percent of vaginal and vulvar cancers and more than 60 percent of penile cancers are caused by HPV.<sup>10</sup>
- More than half (53 percent) of adults are unaware HPV can lead to cancer if untreated.<sup>11</sup>
- 62 percent of parents say their children's pediatricians have not stressed the importance of their children getting the HPV vaccine.<sup>12</sup>
- Less than one-half of adults (46 percent) are aware that with immunization, HPV-related cancers can be prevented.<sup>13</sup>
- Maximum immunity is achieved by vaccination at age 11-12, before exposure to the virus, yet:
  - Only 39.7 percent of adolescent girls in the U.S. have received the recommended doses of the HPV vaccine.<sup>14</sup>
  - Only 21.6 percent of adolescent boys in the U.S. have received the recommended doses of the HPV vaccine.<sup>15</sup>
- Only three in five patients (62 percent) who are recommended HPV vaccination comply and receive it on schedule. This is a significantly lower level of compliance compared to all other vaccinations.<sup>16</sup>

### The risk factors:

You may be at increased risk for HPV infection if you:

- Have had multiple sexual partners
- Are a woman who has had unprotected sex with uncircumcised men
- Are a man who is uncircumcised
- Are a man who has sex with men

***Regardless of whether you are at increased risk or average risk for HPV infection, all young men and women of recommended age need to be vaccinated. Talk to your health care provider about getting vaccinated.***

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### Think About the Link<sup>®</sup> campaign:

*Think About the Link<sup>®</sup>* is a prevention and education campaign from the Prevent Cancer Foundation<sup>®</sup> to advance awareness of the connection between certain viruses and cancer. The campaign focuses on three viruses linked to cancer: human papillomavirus (HPV), hepatitis B and hepatitis C. *Think About the Link<sup>®</sup>* aims to increase screening rates for the viruses, increase immunization rates for HPV and hepatitis B and raise awareness of available treatment options for hepatitis C.

#### REFERENCES

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- 5 CDC "HPV-Associated Cancer Statistics. <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/hpv/statistics/index.htm>
- 6 CDC. "Cervical Cancer Statistics." September 20, 2015. <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/statistics/>
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