

HPV Vaccine: Taking a Shot at Cervical Cancer

January is National Cervical Cancer Awareness Month. According to the American Cancer Society, about 14-thousand women in the U.S. will be diagnosed with cervical cancer, and more than 42-hundred will lose their lives to the disease this year.

Unlike many cancers, however, we know what causes nearly 99% of all cervical cancer cases: the human papillomavirus, or HPV.

HPV is a common virus that will infect most sexually active people at some point in their lives – about four out of five people. An estimated 80-million Americans are currently infected with 14-million new infections diagnosed each year.

However, this trend can be slowed, or even stopped in future generations, with a vaccine. Dr. James Mikeworth, an OSF HealthCare pediatrician in Pontiac, Illinois, recommends the vaccine for both girls and boys.

“Right now the HPV vaccine has shown a very good immunity and longevity for that immunity through your 20s and 30s. So we know that it works and we know it lasts.” explained Dr. James Mikeworth, an OSF HealthCare physician in Pontiac, Illinois. He recommends the vaccine for both girls and boys.

There are about 100 types of HPV infections, affecting both men and women. Most go away on their own, but one in ten infections will eventually cause health problems. Besides cervical cancer, these include anal, vulvar, vaginal, or penile cancer, genital warts or throat cancer.

Health care experts are urging parents to get their preteens vaccinated against HPV, even if they don't think their child is sexually active. The HPV vaccine works best in people who haven't yet been exposed to the virus.

Dr. Mikeworth says the HPV vaccine could prevent 30,000 cases of cancer each year, and parents can provide that protection by simply getting the shot for their kids.

“I am still shocked when people say no because it's our first vaccine that's been proven to prevent cancer in women. With cancer being such a hot-button issue for such a long time, we have something telling you it will prevent cancer in your kid, I think every parent should jump on that chance.” urged Dr. Mikeworth.

The American Cancer Society recommends the HPV vaccine for preteens with the optimal age being 11 or 12 years old.

It can be given up to age 26 with either a two or three shot series, depending on the age of the person being vaccinated.

Dr. Mikeworth encourages parents to have a conversation with their child's health care provider to better understand how the vaccine works.

“We have the ability to completely eradicate a virus that can cause cancer, which is pretty phenomenal. We just have to get the public on board with it,” he said.

Learn more about the HPV vaccine [here](#), or go to osfhealthcare.org and search “HPV.”