

HPV Vaccination for Boys an Important Recommendation, Infectious Disease Specialists Say

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Area infectious disease specialists are commending a Centers for Disease Control advisory board for recommending Tuesday that boys be vaccinated, ideally between ages 11 and 12, against sexually transmitted forms of human papillomavirus.

Strains of HPV can cause a number of malignancies, including cervical cancer, anal cancer, mouth cancer and throat cancer, as well as genital warts.

The vote by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices will likely push doctors to include HPV vaccination as part of pre-teen boys' vaccine schedule if the policy change is, as widely expected, approved by the CDC's director and the Department of Health and Human Services,

For a number of years, the CDC has recommended immunizing girls with the vaccine in three phrases, starting at ages 11-12.

The goal is to get individuals immunized before they become sexually active, according to Dr. Lyssette Cardona, an infectious disease specialist with Cleveland Clinic Florida. Cardona called the vaccine safe and effective.

There is no data to suggest HPV vaccinations prompt young people to become sexually active, she said.

"What we are doing is encouraging the promotion of health," Cardona said. "It's a major health breakthrough that we can use a vaccine to prevent serious consequences, including cancers."

Dr. Chad Sanborn, a pediatric infectious disease specialist at St. Mary's Medical Center, agreed. "It's one of the rare instances where we can actually give someone a vaccination that will decrease their chances of getting certain types of cancer."

Cardona said HPV is the most common sexually transmitted disease in the United States.

"The statistics show that 75 to 80 percent of women and men in the United States will become infected at one point in their lives with HPV after they become sexually active," she said.

Most people are able to get rid of the virus, usually within two years, without vaccination, she said. But individuals whose immune systems do not destroy the virus are at risk for contracting one of the cancers or genital warts, according to the Cleveland Clinic physician. HPV strains 6 and 11 can cause genital warts and strains 16 and 18 may lead to cancer, she said.

Sanborn, of St. Mary's Medical Center, said the panel's universal recommendation could help reduce the transmission of the sexually transmitted virus. A universal recommendation is likely to lead to insurance coverage of the vaccination.

The universal recommendation, unlike a permissive (or optional) recommendation, sends a strong message, according to Sanborn.

"Hopefully it will decrease the rates of infection in general. That's very important for women indirectly as men can certainly pass human papillomavirus to women," Sanborn said.

Palm Beacher Bill Bone said he and his ex-wife, ob-gyn specialist Dr. Melanie Bone, had their two daughters vaccinated against HPV a few years ago. Their four children range from 14 to 17.

Now it's his two boys' turn, the lawyer said.

"I think we are going to vaccinate our boys now that it's recommended," Bone said