

# Your Health Matters

## HPV VACCINE IS CANCER PREVENTION

Have you heard people say children grow up in a blink of an eye? One day you were holding a tiny, helpless infant in your arms, and the next day you look up and your confident, self-sufficient 15-year-old brought home his driver's permit. Are you prepared for that?

Are you prepared when your daughter's pediatrician asks you to consider whether she will get the HPV immunization? At 11 years old, she is years away from being sexually active and at risk for HPV virus and cervical cancer. But this vaccine is shown to be most effective when given to boys and girls at age 11 – 12, before they are exposed to the virus.

Human papillomavirus, or HPV, is a group of more than 150 viruses that affect males and females and can cause genital warts and cervical or other cancers. HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the U.S., with half of new infections among adolescents and young adults aged 15 – 24.

HPV is transmitted through intimate skin-to-skin contact during vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has the virus. Condoms may lower the risk of HPV if worn with every sex act, but they don't fully protect against HPV. The only sure way to avoid HPV is to abstain from sex.

Symptoms of HPV can develop years after coming in contact with the infection, making it hard to know when infection occurred. Some people who have HPV will not develop any symptoms. Others will develop warts at the area of exposure, which may require medical treatment. In most cases, HPV goes away on its own and does not cause any health problems, but in some cases it can cause cervical cancer and other cancers.

There is no treatment for the virus itself, but there are treatments for the problems that HPV can cause. There are also several ways to protect against HPV and cervical cancer. Vaccination is recommended for both males and females, and is most effective when given at 11 or 12 years old, before teens are exposed to the HPV virus. The vaccine is given in 3 doses over 6 months, and protects against 9 types of HPV which cause 90% of cervical, vulvar, vaginal and anal cancers. It can be given to males up through 21 years old, or females through 26 years old.

So, even though you hope your daughter won't be exposed to the HPV virus for many more years, you may need to decide now whether to protect her with the HPV vaccine. I hope you'll consider it for your children, as well.

The Montgomery County Health Department loves taking care of your family, and works every day to protect, promote and improve health in our community. To learn more, call 573-564-2495 or visit us online at [www.montgomerycountyhealth.org](http://www.montgomerycountyhealth.org) or on Facebook or Twitter @healthymoco. ■



8.17.16