

Is the HPV vaccine necessary?

August 29 2014, by Evie Polsley

As the school year starts in full swing many parents wonder if their child should receive the HPV vaccine, which is recommended for girls ages 11-26 and boys 11-21. There are a lot of questions and controversy around this vaccine, but many pediatricians say it comes down to protecting people from a leading cause of death.

"I often have parents ask me if their child should get the HPV [vaccine](#) and what are my thoughts about giving it. Some parents are concerned it will promote [sexual activity](#), others think it is unnecessary and others think their child is too young. If the child falls between the recommended ages given by the American Academy of Pediatrics, I strongly recommend the vaccination. It really could be the difference between life and death," said Hannah Chow-Johnson, MD, pediatrician at Loyola University Health System and assistant professor in the Department of Pediatrics at Loyola University Chicago Stritch School of Medicine.

According to Chow, there are only two shots that can prevent cancer. One is for hepatitis B and the other is the [human papilloma virus](#) (HPV) vaccine. HPV is the most common [sexually transmitted disease](#) and is known to cause several different types of cancer, including cervical cancer, which is the second most fatal cancer for women.

"Parents need to take into consideration the anti-cancer benefits when considering if they want their child to receive the HPV vaccine," Chow said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, there are more than 20 million people in the U.S. infected with HPV and at least half of these are between the ages of 15-25.

HPV is transmitted through intercourse and genital contact. Both men and women can harbor the virus, which can remain in a person for years after the initial infection.

"One of the scary aspects of HPV is that a person can be infected and not even know it. He or she may have no symptoms at all and still be spreading the virus," Chow said. "This is why I strongly believe in vaccinating males and females early, well before any exposure takes place."

Prevention is critical when it comes to HPV. According to Chow, the vaccine's protection rate is 93 percent when given before any exposure. After exposure the vaccine doesn't treat pre-existing viruses but will help protect against future exposure.

"HPV is a very dangerous virus that can lead to death. Since there is no cure, prevention is all the more important. This vaccine could save the life of your [child](#)," Chow said.

Provided by Loyola University Health System

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