

Think About the Link: HPV & Cancer

HPV is a virus that has been linked to many different types of cancer.

The good news is there are approved vaccines that can protect against HPV-related cancers.

The Virus:

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection. It is so common that nearly all sexually active men and women get one of the many types of the virus during their lifetime. HPV is spread through vaginal, anal or oral sex and can be contracted even from an infected person who has no symptoms. An infected person may not develop symptoms until many years after becoming infected.

The Cancer Link:

Almost all cervical cancers are linked to HPV. The virus also can cause vulvar, vaginal, penile and anal cancers, as well as cancer of the head and neck, and back of the throat, including the base of the tongue and tonsils (called oropharyngeal cancer).¹ A person with HPV may not develop cancer for many years after becoming infected and – because the body often clears the virus on its own – it is virtually impossible to know who will get cancer from HPV.¹

Sixty-two percent of parents agree their pediatricians have not stressed the importance of vaccinating their children against HPV.² If you are a parent, be sure to bring up vaccination with your child's pediatrician or other primary care provider and tell them you want your child protected from cancer.

Did You Know?

- About 91 percent of cervical cancers are caused by HPV.³
- About 91 percent of anal cancers are caused by HPV.⁴
- About 72 percent of oropharyngeal cancers are caused by HPV.⁴
- About 75 percent of vaginal cancers, 69 percent of vulvar cancers, and 63 percent of penile cancers are caused by HPV.⁴
- Every year, more than 27,000 women and men are diagnosed with a cancer caused by HPV.
- More than 12,000 women in the United States are diagnosed with cervical cancer each year.⁵
- More than half (53 percent) of adults are not aware that the HPV virus can lead to cancer if untreated.²

Cancer Prevention:

There are three vaccines that protect against HPV-related cancers, and they have been approved as safe and effective. HPV vaccinations are given as a series of three shots over six months. All three vaccines have been approved by the FDA for women and two have been approved for men. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends the HPV vaccine for boys and girls ages 11 or 12, however, all the HPV vaccines are available for women through age 26. One of the vaccines is available for men through age 21 and one is available for men through age 26. It is important to note that women who have been vaccinated still need to have regular Pap smear to screen for cervical cancer.⁶

Did you know?

- Fewer than one-half of adults (46 percent) are aware that with immunization, most HPV-induced cancers can be prevented.²
- Only 39.7 percent of adolescent girls in the U.S. have received all three recommended doses of the HPV vaccine.⁷
- Only 21.6 percent of adolescent boys in the U.S. have received all three recommended doses of the HPV vaccine.⁷
- Only three in five patients (62 percent) recommended to be vaccinated against HPV comply and receive the series on schedule. This is a far lower level of compliance compared to all other vaccinations.²

Risk Factors:

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

- Have had many sexual partners;
- Are a woman who has had unprotected sex with uncircumcised men; or
- Are a man who is uncircumcised.

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

The Campaign:

Think About the Link is a multi-year education campaign developed by the Prevent Cancer Foundation to increase awareness of the connection between certain viruses and cancer. The campaign is focused on three viruses linked to cancer: human papillomavirus (HPV), hepatitis B and hepatitis C. Think About the Link aims to increase screening rates for the viruses, increase immunization rates for HPV and hepatitis B and raise awareness of and access to available treatment options for hepatitis C.

References:

- ¹ CDC. "Genital HPV Infection - Fact Sheet." February 23, 2015. <http://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/stdfact-hpv.htm>.
- ² Sourced from a survey conducted by the Prevent Cancer Foundation in partnership with Russell Research Firm
- ³ CDC. "How Many Cancers Are Linked with HPV Each Year?" June 23, 2014. <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/hpv/statistics/cases.htm>
- ⁴ CDC. "The Link Between HPV and Cancer." September 30, 2015. <http://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/cancer.html>.
- ⁵ CDC. "Cervical Cancer Statistics." September 20, 2015. <http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/statistics/>.
- ⁶ CDC. "HPV Vaccines: Vaccinating Your Preteen or Teen." January 26, 2015. <http://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/vaccine.html>.
- ⁷ CDC. "Teen Vaccination Coverage." July 30, 2015. <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/who/teens/vaccination-coverage.html>.