A Vaccine to Prevent Cancer

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In October 2018, the FDA approved the HPV vaccine for women and men between the ages of 27 and 45. Previously, the vaccine was only approved to be given between the ages of 9 through 26.

"I think it's exciting because there were a whole group of people that weren't able to get the vaccine, they were older than the oldest recommended age when the vaccine was approved," said Dr. Kellie Rath, a gynecologic oncologist at OhioHealth Riverside Methodist Hospital. "Now a whole new group of people will benefit from the vaccine."

Dr. Rath and her colleague, Dr. Aine Clements, who is also a gynecologic oncologist, were not able to get the vaccine when it was first released. Now, they can protect themselves against some of the very same cancers they treat.

"I see women who are suffering the consequences of HPV–related disease. Not just cancer, but all the pre-cancerous lesions. I want to avoid getting those things," said Dr. Clements. "I was very excited when I saw that they increased the age to 45 to get the vaccine because I want that opportunity. I was a little too old to get it when it first came out."

The HPV vaccine can prevent a variety of cancers. If a patient has already been exposed to one of the nine strains of HPV, the vaccine will prevent them from the strains they haven't been exposed to yet, according to the Centers for Disease Control. The CDC says every year roughly 14 million Americans become infected with HPV.

"The HPV vaccine prevents infection with the HPV virus which we know is associated with lots of pre-malignant and malignant conditions – cervical cancer, vulvar cancer, vaginal cancer, anal cancer, as well as head and neck cancers, said Dr. Rath. "I am very excited to get the vaccine and now I'll be able to share with all my patients that I too have had the vaccine in encouraging them to move forward."

Recently, Dr. Rath and Dr. Clements got their first of three shots in the series. They were also joined by Dr. Jon Montemayor, a third year family medicine resident physician at Riverside. Doctors encourage both women and men to consider getting vaccinated

"We want men to be vaccinated as well," said Dr. Rath. "Head and neck is one of the growing HPV-related cancers and that's more common in middle aged men."

"I thought it would be not only beneficial for myself, but my loved one to get the HPV vaccine," said Dr. Montemayor. "Just because you're male doesn't mean you're exempt from the virus – and it causes a lot of different cancers."

"I always talk about vaccines as insurance," said Dr. Laurie Hommema, program director of the Riverside family practice residency program. "We don't know if you'll be exposed to HPV in your life, but there's a good chance you will be. And this is an insurance policy against cancer."

As a gynecologic oncologist, Dr. Clements sees patients with cancer on a daily basis. She encourages people to consider this vaccine.

"The things that I see every day that are preventable have really affected me," said Dr. Clements. "I think anything you can do to prevent those outcomes is a good thing. The fact that we have this vaccine – it's a very powerful tool that we can use to prevent a lot of suffering."

To learn more about OhioHealth Cancer Care, visit ohiohealth.com/services/cancer/

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Based in Columbus, Ohio, OhioHealth has been recognized as one of the top five large health systems in America by Truven Health Analytics, an honor it has received six times. It is also recognized by FORTUNE as one of the "100 Best Companies to Work For" and has been for 13 years in a row, 2007-2019.

Serving its communities since 1891, it is a family of 30,000 associates, physicians and volunteers, and a network of 12 hospitals, 200+ ambulatory sites, hospice, home-health, medical equipment and other health services spanning a 47-county area.

OhioHealth hospitals include OhioHealth Riverside Methodist Hospital, OhioHealth Grant Medical Center, OhioHealth Doctors Hospital, OhioHealth Grady Memorial Hospital, OhioHealth Dublin Methodist Hospital, OhioHealth Hardin Memorial Hospital, OhioHealth Marion General Hospital, OhioHealth O'Bleness Hospital, OhioHealth Mansfield Hospital, OhioHealth Shelby Hospital, OhioHealth Grove City Methodist Hospital and OhioHealth Berger Hospital. For more information, please visit our website at www.ohiohealth.com.

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