

Dear Parents,

The Washington State Legislature passed a law this year that requires schools to provide human papillomavirus disease (HPV) information each year to parents/guardians of students in grades 6-12.

Vaccination is not required for school attendance.

HPV is a virus that causes cervical cancer. HPV lives on the skin or mucous membranes and is spread through genital contact. Most people with HPV do not have any signs or symptoms.

A vaccine is now available to girls and young women which protects against several types of the virus, preventing 70 per cent of cervical cancer. Since HPV is a sexually transmitted disease, the vaccine should be given before sexual activity begins. The vaccine is not effective if given after the HPV virus is acquired. It does not protect against all types of HPV, other sexually transmitted diseases, or prevent pregnancy.

Federal-level recommendations are that all girls age 11-12 years old receive the HPV vaccine. The vaccine has been approved for females from age 9 to 26 years old with the recommendation of their health care providers. The vaccine is a series of three doses over a six month period.

The vaccine is available through your health care provider or the Cowlitz County Health Department. Providers in Washington have the HPV vaccine supplied by the state to provide at no cost for girls under age 19. However, there may be a charge for an office visit and/or administration fee.

It is important to discuss this matter with your health care provider to find out if this vaccine is appropriate for your daughter. More information on HPV and cervical cancer is available at the following sites:

Washington State Department of Health, (800) 525-0127,

www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/immunize/documents/hpvvaccinefactsheet.pdf

Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, (800) 232-4636, www.cdc.gov/std/hpv

Cowlitz County Health Department, 414-5599, www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/health

American Cancer Society, www.cancer.org

Sincerely,
Your School Nurse

What is HPV and how does it affect the body?

HPV is a very common virus. There are many types of HPV. Most are harmless and do not cause infections or symptoms. Some types of HPV can cause cervical cancer or genital warts.

How is it spread?

HPV is spread through genital contact. Most people who have HPV do not have any symptoms. They can have the virus and easily spread it to others without even knowing.

Who can get it?

At least 50 percent of sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives. Both women and men can get HPV, and spread it to others without realizing they have the virus. HPV infection is most common in women and men in their late teens and early 20's.

The best way to prevent HPV is to abstain from all sexual activity. People with only one lifetime partner can get HPV if their partner was sexually active in a previous relationship. The success of condoms in preventing HPV infection is uncertain. Condom users do have lower cervical cancer rates. HPV infections can occur in both male and female genital areas whether or not they are covered by a latex condom. Condoms are a good way to prevent sexually transmitted infections like HIV, gonorrhea, and Chlamydia.

How do I know if I have HPV?

Some people know they have HPV because they have symptoms, such as genital warts. Most people **don't know** they have HPV because they have no signs or symptoms.

Women may find out they have HPV through cervical cancer screening (Pap tests) and HPV antibody testing. Healthcare providers usually do not test for HPV unless they find abnormal cervical cell changes. Providers don't routinely test women or men for HPV at this time. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have questions about HPV testing.

How does HPV cause cervical cancer?

Some types of HPV can infect cells in the cervix (the opening to the uterus/womb) and cause abnormalities. If the infection continues untreated, the abnormalities can lead to cervical cancer. This is usually a slow process. It can take years for HPV infection to progress to cervical cancer.

Pap tests can detect cell changes long before cervical cancer develops. Women who get the HPV vaccine should continue getting Pap tests. The vaccines do not protect against all the types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer.

Where can I find more information?

HPV Infection & Vaccine

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices
American Social Health Association
Food and Drug Administration

www.cdc.gov/std/hpv
www.cdc.gov/nip/acip
www.ashastd.org
www.fda.gov/cber/vaccines.htm

HPV Vaccine

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