5 Things You May Not Know about HPV

January is Cervical Health Awareness Month. When we think about cervical health, we also think about human papillomavirus (HPV).

But, HPV does not only cause cervical cancer. HPV infections can also lead to cancers of the throat and genital regions other than the cervix, including the anus, penis, vagina, and vulva. Some types of HPV cause painful and unsightly genital warts.

Check out these five facts about HPV.

8 of 10 sexually active people get HPV at some point during their lifetime.
Infection with human papillomavirus (HPV) is so common that nearly everyone who is sexually active will be infected with at least one type of HPV at some point. Most people with HPV do not experience any symptoms, so they never know they were infected.

Because people often do not know they are infected, it was difficult to reduce the spread of the virus in the past. However, data have shown that since the HPV vaccine became available, even people who have not been vaccinated are less likely to get infected, suggesting that use of the vaccine has decreased transmission (i.e., herd immunity). Despite this success, the vaccine is still the best way to make sure you or a loved one is protected, since in most cases we do not know who is infected.

Australia is likely to be the first country to eliminate cervical cancer.
Australia has achieved very high HPV vaccination rates for boys and girls. These high vaccination rates, coupled with aggressive cervical screening campaigns, have put Australia on track to become the first country in the world to eliminate cervical cancer.

HPV causes about 7 of 10 throat cancers.
It’s estimated that about 7 of every 10 oropharyngeal (i.e., throat) cancers in the United States are caused by human papillomavirus. HPV-related throat cancer affects men about three times more often than women. The HPV vaccine protects against the types of HPV that cause oropharyngeal cancer.

HPV vaccine provides better immunity than natural infection.
HPV vaccine is one of several vaccines that induce a stronger immune response than natural infection. This is due, in part, to the purity and quantity of the viral proteins contained in the HPV vaccine.

*Haemophilus influenzae* type b (Hib), tetanus and pneumococcus vaccines also provide greater protection than acquired through natural infection.

The HPV vaccine is safe.
The HPV vaccine is made using a single protein from the surface of the virus, so it can’t reproduce and cause illness or cancer. More than 120 million doses of HPV vaccine have been given in the United States alone. Likewise, vaccine safety studies have shown that the HPV vaccine is both safe and effective.

The Vaccine Education Center has compiled a list of peer-reviewed studies that have examined the safety of HPV vaccine. Visit vaccine.chop.edu/safety-references.

Additional resources

- Questions and Answers about HPV and the Vaccine (Prevent-HPV.org)
- *Talking About Vaccines with Dr. Paul Offit*: HPV videos (vaccine.chop.edu/videos)
Trivia Answer:
The correct answer is B. More than 100 types of HPV have been identified. Some have been found to cause disease. Types 16 and 18 are the most common causes of cervical cancer and types 6 and 11 are the most common causes of anal and genital warts.

Go to vaccine.chop.edu/trivia to play Just the Vax, the Vaccine Education Center’s trivia game, where you can find this question and others like it.

NEWS & NOTES

Vax Talk — Alternative Vaccine Schedules with Dr. Paul Offit
Parents sometimes wonder whether too many vaccines overwhelm their children’s immune systems. To ease this fear, they often ask healthcare providers to spread out vaccines instead of following the schedule recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). But are these “alternative schedules” a good idea?

In the November Vax Talk episode, Dr. Paul Offit explains the science behind the recommended vaccine schedule and the dangers of delaying vaccines.

Vax Talk is produced by the parent-led organization called Voices for Vaccines. You can learn more about their efforts at voicesforvaccines.org.

Shot of Prevention video blog
Shot of Prevention, the popular blog hosted by Vaccinate Your Family, has added a new video feature. The video series will feature Taryn Chapman, creator of The Vaccine Mom blog. Chapman is a molecular biologist and medical writer. The topic of the first video is flu vaccine.

• Check out the new video series on Shot of Prevention (shotofprevention.com).
• Visit The Vaccine Mom blog (thevaccinemom.com).
• Visit the Vaccinate Your Family website (vaccinateyourfamily.org).

Smart Travel Enrollment Program
U.S. citizens traveling or living abroad can sign up for the Smart Traveler Enrollment Program (STEP) to receive the latest security updates for their location. Offered by the U.S. Department of State, the free service enables the U.S. embassy or consulate to contact its citizens in an emergency. Learn more about STEP and enroll today (travel.state.gov/step).

Whether you’re traveling for business or pleasure, it is also a good idea to keep the U.S. embassy number handy in case of an emergency:

• From the US or Canada: 1-888-407-4747
• From other countries: 00-1-202-501-4444

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