



## Abstinence Policy

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### Public Policy Issues

### **Take Action: How to Guide HPV Vaccine Policy Decisions at the State Level**

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Jan. 18, 2007

Many states are considering legislation to mandate the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine for all pre-teen adolescent females. While there are some tremendous medical benefits to the vaccine, it is important that parents and lawmakers understand the facts about what the HPV vaccine will and won't do — and approach policy decisions accordingly.

Focus on the Family **supports** widespread availability of HPV vaccines and recognizes this as a significant public health advancement with the potential to save millions of women's lives around the world.

However, Focus on the Family **opposes** mandatory HPV vaccinations for entry into public school. The types of HPV prevented by the vaccines are contracted only through sexual contact. Youth cannot contract these viruses through normal school-related activities. An HPV vaccination requirement for school entry goes beyond the realm of a legitimate public health risk and intrudes into private family and personal sexual health decision-making.

Focus on the Family has always maintained that a child's parents or legal guardians are the best decision-makers regarding their child's health. Even with the medical promises of the HPV vaccine, we feel strongly that legislative action and language should not in any way burden or intrude on parents' rights to make medical decisions for their minor children.

As lawmakers in your state consider how to address HPV vaccinations, use the following facts and recommendations to ensure parental rights are protected and policy decisions are based on the most accurate information.

#### **Facts about HPV**

- Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the United States infecting approximately 20 million Americans with more than 6 million new cases each year.<sup>1</sup>

- More than 100 types of HPV are known to infect humans.<sup>2</sup>
- Cervical cancer is attributed to HPV nearly 100% of the time.<sup>3</sup>
- Only 40% of women responding to a recent survey had ever heard about HPV and less than 20% knew that it caused cervical cancer.<sup>4</sup>

### **Facts about HPV Vaccines**

- HPV vaccines have the potential to save thousands of lives in the United States and millions of lives globally.
- HPV vaccines are the first vaccines developed for an infection that is transmitted **only** through sexual behavior.
- No vaccine is 100% effective against disease.
- The presently available vaccine (Gardasil) will prevent the transmission and contraction of four types of HPV that are exclusively sexually transmitted.
- Prevention of these four types could prevent **70%** of cervical cancer and **90%** of venereal warts.<sup>5</sup> *However, it will not eradicate cervical cancer, nor will it eradicate the many other types of HPV infection.*

### **Policy recommendations**

- Proposed legislation should affirm, if not overtly state, that parents will retain the right and responsibility for their minor children's health care.
- The best legislation will feature an **opt-in provision**, through which parents must make an affirmative decision before their child is vaccinated. An opt-in model respects and affirms parental rights as well as places a greater burden on the state department of health to educate parents regarding HPV and the vaccine.
- If lawmakers pursue an **opt-out** model, placing the burden on parents to refuse the vaccine for their child, the opt-out procedure must be easy to complete and be non-discriminatory toward those who refuse the vaccine.
- Any legislation should provide means for all parents to be informed about the existence of medical, philosophical and religious immunization exemptions in their state as well as the process of obtaining an exemption.
- Mandated health information related to HPV vaccination should include, at a minimum, the following points about the effectiveness and limitations of this vaccine:
  - The HPV vaccine will at best protect against **70%** of cervical cancer, **not 100%**.<sup>6</sup>

- The vaccine does not lessen the importance of gynecological exams for all sexually active females. These should occur at least once per year to screen for sexually transmitted infections, including HPV.
- Whether or not the HPV vaccine is used, all sexual behaviors carry the risk of transmitting and contracting STIs some of which will have life-long consequences.
- The four types of HPV that the present vaccine prevents are 100% sexually transmitted.

You can also find more information about this topic at: [www.citizenlink.org/hpv](http://www.citizenlink.org/hpv)

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<sup>1</sup> Weinstock H., Berman S., Cates W., Jr. "Sexually Transmitted Diseases among American Youth: Incidence and Prevalence Estimates, 2000," *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health*, vol. 36 (2004).

<sup>2</sup> Koutsky L.A., Kiviat N.B., "Genital Human Papillomavirus." In: Holmes K.K., Mardh P.A., Sparling P.F., et al., eds. *Sexually Transmitted Diseases*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. New York, NY: McGraw Hill, Co; 1999: 347-359.

<sup>3</sup> Walboomers J.M., Jacobs M.V., Manos M.M., et al. "Human Papillomavirus is a Necessary Cause of Invasive Cervical Cancer Worldwide." *J Pathology*. 1999; 189:12-19.

<sup>4</sup> National Cancer Institute, *2005 Health Information National Trends Survey*, <http://hints.cancer.gov/hints/> (22 February 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *HPV and HPV Vaccine: Information for Healthcare Providers*, August 2006, <http://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/hpv-vacc-hcp-3-pages.pdf> (22 February 2007).

<sup>6</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *HPV and HPV Vaccine: Information for Healthcare Providers*, August 2006, <http://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/hpv-vacc-hcp-3-pages.pdf> (22 February 2007).

Updated on February 22, 2007