



HPV Vaccine

The human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the United States, currently infecting approximately 79 million Americans with more than 14 million new cases each year. HPV is the leading cause of cervical cancer. It is also associated with oral cancer, cancers of the vagina, vulva, penis, anus, head and neck, and genital warts.

The seriousness of HPV and other STIs underscores the significance of God's design for sexuality to human wellbeing. Thus, Focus on the Family affirms – above any available health intervention – abstinence until marriage and faithfulness after marriage as the best and primary practice in preventing HPV and other STIs.

That said, pharmaceutical manufacturer Merck has developed an HPV vaccine (Gardasil 9) that provides immunity for seven types of HPV that cause cervical cancer and at the same time targets two common causes of genital warts. Currently, Gardasil 9 is the only HPV vaccine marketed in the United States. The FDA has approved the use of Gardasil 9 in females and males ages 9 through 26.

Recognizing the worldwide detriment to individuals and families resulting from HPV, Focus on the Family supports and encourages the development of safe, effective and ethical vaccines against HPV, as well as other viruses. The use of these vaccines may prevent many cases of cervical cancer, thus potentially saving the lives of hundreds of thousands of women across the globe.

Therefore, Focus on the Family **supports** universal availability of the HPV vaccine but **opposes** government-mandated HPV vaccinations for entry to public school. The decision of whether to vaccinate a minor against this or other sexually transmitted infections should remain with the child's parents or guardian. As in all areas of sexual health and education, Focus on the Family upholds the parents' right to be the primary decision maker and educator for their children. The use of the HPV vaccine should involve informed consent for parents as well as education for both parents and youth regarding the potential benefits and risks of the vaccine. In making this decision, parents should consider the following:

- No vaccine is 100% effective against disease;
- There are more than 150 types of HPV. Gardasil 9 is effective against nine of these (and perhaps several more);

- The types of the virus that this vaccine protects against are the cause of most but not all cases of cervical cancer;
- HPV infection can result from sexual assault, including date rape;
- A young person may marry someone previously exposed to and still carrying the virus;
- The HPV vaccine does not protect against other STIs or prevent pregnancy;
- The HPV vaccine does not, in any circumstance, negate or substitute the best health message of sexual abstinence until marriage and sexual faithfulness after marriage.

Focus on the Family does not endorse a particular HPV vaccine product or manufacturer.