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HPV Vaccine Key to Preventing Cancer Later in Life

With HPV Vaccine Rates Down, MDCH is Reminding Parents of the Protection it Offers

LANSING – Recently, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that HPV vaccination rates in girls ages 13-17 years failed to increase, and actually declined slightly between 2011 and 2012. With this new data, the Michigan Department of Community Health (MDCH) is working to educate Michiganders about the importance of getting the HPV vaccine to protect against cancer.

Approximately 79 million Americans are currently infected with HPV, and about 14 million people become newly infected each year. HPV is also so common that nearly all sexually-active men and women will get at least one type of HPV at some point in their lives. In Michigan, 47.2 percent of females 13-17 years of age have received one or more doses of HPV vaccine, and only 27.5 percent of females 13-17 years of age have received all three doses of the vaccine, according to April 2013 data from the Michigan Care Improvement Registry (MCIR).

According to the CDC, for each year the 3-dose HPV vaccine series coverage remains near the current level of 33 percent, an estimated additional 4,400 women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer and 1,400 cervical cancer-attributable deaths will occur each year. Among girls unvaccinated for HPV, 84 percent had a healthcare visit where they received another vaccine, such as meningitis or pertussis, but not HPV vaccine.

“It is concerning to see the rates of vaccination against HPV at these low levels compared with other vaccines, particularly because vaccinating teens and young adults now with this critical vaccine prevents them from getting different types of HPV-related cancer in the future,” said Dr. Matthew Davis, Chief Medical Executive with the MDCH. “As parents and medical professionals, our responsibility is to protect the health of our youth, including taking preventive measures. The HPV vaccine truly is an important tool for allowing us to do so.”

Not receiving a healthcare provider's recommendation for HPV vaccine was one of the five main reasons parents reported for not vaccinating their sons or daughters. The other responses parents provided indicate gaps in understanding the vaccine, including why vaccination is recommended at ages 11 or 12. Parents also reported safety concerns as a reason for not vaccinating. In the seven years of post-licensure vaccine safety monitoring and evaluation conducted independently by federal agencies and vaccine manufacturers, no serious safety concerns have been identified.

Most private health insurance plans must cover the HPV vaccine at no out-of-pocket cost, meaning no co-pay or deductible. HPV is covered under the Vaccines for Children Program which provides no- or low-cost vaccines to eligible children, 18 years of age and younger. Parents and caregivers are encouraged to ask about vaccination every time they take children for a healthcare visit.

Recently, the MDCH launched a radio and online HPV campaign to educate Michiganders about the importance of the HPV vaccine in protecting against cervical cancer. For more information about HPV, visit www.michigan.gov/HPV.

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