



LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY
Health Department

1930 Ninth Avenue
Helena, MT 59601
PH: 406.4HEALTH or 406.443.2584
Fax: 406.457.8990

For IR Public Health Column

November 2013

Contact: Melanie Reynolds, Health Officer, 406-457-8910

Gayle Shirley, Communications Coordinator, 406-457-8908

HPV Shots a Way To Give Your Kids A Healthier Future

**By Melanie Reynolds
County Health Officer**

As health officer, I often get questions from friends and relatives about health issues. Lately one question has really puzzled me: “Should I get my preteen child vaccinated against HPV?”

My advice is, of course! As a parent, why wouldn’t you want to do everything in your power to protect your child’s health now and in the future?

HPV (human papillomavirus) can cause serious health problems, including certain types of cancer. The virus passes from person to person during skin-to-skin sexual contact. It’s so common that at least half of all sexually active men and women get it at some point during their lives, although many don’t develop any symptoms.

About 14 million Americans, including teens, become infected with HPV each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). About 17,000 women and 9,000 men are diagnosed with HPV-related cancers. These include cervical cancer in women and penile cancer in men, as well as throat cancer, anal cancer, and genital warts in both men and women.

And yet, vaccines are now available to help prevent HPV infections. The vaccines are administered in a series of three shots over six months. The series must be completed *before* any type of sexual contact, to allow time for the body to build an immune response.

That’s why the American Cancer Society and CDC recommend HPV vaccination for girls and boys starting at age 11 or 12, hopefully before their first sexual encounter. The American Academy of Family Physicians, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine all are strong backers of HPV vaccination.

Many parents of preteens just aren’t ready to think about their children becoming sexually active. But the public health case for HPV vaccination is compelling. Repeated studies have shown that the vaccine is safe and effective. More than 57 million doses have been distributed so far, and no serious safety concerns have surfaced, according to the CDC.

Last summer, *The Journal of Infectious Disease* published a study that looked at the prevalence of HPV infections in U.S. girls and women before and after the introduction of the HPV vaccine. The study showed that since the vaccine was introduced in 2006, vaccine-type HPV prevalence decreased 56 percent among girls 14-19 years old.

“The report should be a wake-up call to our nation to protect the next generation by increasing HPV vaccination rates,” said CDC Director Tom Frieden in a news release. “Unfortunately only one third of girls aged 13-17 have been fully vaccinated with HPV vaccine.... Our low vaccination rates represent 50,000 preventable tragedies – 50,000 girls alive today will develop cervical cancer over their lifetime that would have been prevented if we reach 80 percent vaccination rates.”

If you have a child age 11 or 12, I strongly urge you to talk to your health-care provider about the HPV vaccinations. Your child can begin the three-shot series while getting the shots required to attend seventh grade.

If you have a child older than 12, it's not too late to protect him or her. HPV vaccination is also recommended for older teens and young adults up to age 26 who weren't vaccinated when younger.

Remember, getting your preteen vaccinated does not mean your child is ready to have sex. It's an important way to get your child protected before he or she even has to think about it.

The Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department offers HPV vaccinations through our Immunization Program. You and your child can stop in at any of our walk-in immunization clinics, Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. at the Health Center, 1930 Ninth Avenue. For more information, contact the Immunization Program at 443-2485.

HPV vaccinations also are available through other local health-care providers.

For more information on HPV, visit www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/