



## HPV Vaccine

# A Lifesaving Medical Breakthrough

By Dr. Covia Stanley

In June 2006, the Food and Drug Administration approved the license for the use of a human papilloma virus (HPV) vaccine (Gardasil) for immunization against cervical cancer. It has been tested in thousands of females (9 to 26 years of age) worldwide. These studies have shown that the vaccine is both safe and effective. No serious side effects have been revealed. The most common side effect is brief soreness at the injection site.

Cervical cancer is a major health problem in the United States. The American Cancer Society estimates that over 9,710 women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer and 3,700 will die from the disease in 2006.

The human papilloma virus is the leading cause of cervical cancer, a preventable disease found in sexually active women. There are many types of this virus; nonetheless, numbers 16 and 18 have been recognized as the leading pathologic agents. Other causes of cervical cancer include sexual activity in early teens; promiscuity or many sex partners; cervical irritation during coitus or intercourse; chemicals in sperm; and different medications including nicotine from smoking.

Despite these medical advancements, there are a number of misconceptions or myths about this vaccine, falsely giving license to teen girls to engage in premature sexual activity. The vaccine is a great medical breakthrough because it will give young girls the opportunity to grow up and live free from cervical cancer.

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has recommended routine vaccination for girls 11-12 years of age. The recommendation also allows for the vaccination of girls beginning at 9 years old, as well as vaccination of girls and women 13-26 years old.

The vaccine is most effective prior to any sexual intercourse when there is no HPV present. The vaccine is administered in a series of three injections over a six-month period. The second and third doses should be given at two and six months, respectively, after the first dose. The vaccine may be given at the same time of other vaccines, such as meningococcal and Tdap during the 11-12 year-old vaccinations.

Parents should think in terms of the health of their children and do all they can to ensure that vaccines that can prevent disease are received. Parents should continue talking with their children about abstinence and positive hygiene. Most importantly, parents should show and practice love to their children during those formative years so that a positive relationship will be established.

Parents should nurture and spend quality time with their children. Hopefully, by the time a young girl becomes a teen, she

will have enough confidence, self-esteem, and respect that she can emphatically say “no” to any invitation to engage in sexual activity.

Parents need to talk with their daughter’s medical provider to get as much information as possible about this vaccine to understand the benefits of preventing cervical cancer.

Parents can play a pivotal role in the future health of their daughters by helping to disseminate positive information about the vaccine and prevention of cervical cancer. There are too many naysayers and people who feel invincible (“nothing’s going to happen to my daughter”) blocking the way to preventative medical treatment. Informed parents should encourage other parents to seek more information and take their daughters for annual examinations. Motivated parents can set up groups that educate and support sparent having difficulty accepting the need for their daughters getting the vaccine in their early years.

The faith community can be great ambassadors in getting the messages of prevention to both parents and young people. Sex is not a dirty word. It was created by God to accomplish His purposes. Preachers and faith communities they lead cannot keep their heads in the sand. Teens need the nurturing and encouragement of the extended family; that includes their church family.

In addition to cultural endeavors, positive after-school programs, and athletics, teens and young people will greatly benefit from multigenerational

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dialogues, or the “oral tradition”. Intergenerational forums in the church mid-week services or similar settings will help young people appreciate the knowledge and wisdom given to them. Providing wholesome home and church environments will facilitate self-esteem, respect, early goal setting, and academic achievement so that young ladies can make godly decisions about sexual intimacy in an informed and mature way.

The HPV vaccine can be a Balm in Gilead when young girls are treated at the appropriate vaccine schedules. The vaccine is not a substitute for teaching about the importance

or value of abstinence. Additionally, once sexually active, they still will need regular gynecological examinations.

The HPV vaccine is a great medical breakthrough that will give young girls and women the opportunity to live a qualitative life, free of the pain and consequences of cervical cancer.

The vaccine could eradicate cervical cancer within a decade when it is optimally given, when women follow up with physicians if pap smears are abnormal, and when physicians treat and manage all of the pathologic cells of the cervix. **NEV**