

The Importance of the HPV Vaccine

September 26, 2007

HPV, or the Human Papillomavirus, is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections in Canada and around the world. It is estimated that as many as 75 per cent of sexually active men and women will have at least one HPV infection in their lifetime.

Many types of HPV have been identified, with some leading to cervical cancer. There is now a vaccine available to help prevent infection with several types of HPV and offering protection against HPV types responsible for approximately 70 per cent of cervical cancers.

Health Canada approved the HPV vaccine in July 2006, after five years of international clinical trials, in which Sunnybrook took an active role. The HPV vaccine is one of the most studied vaccines ever to come to the Canadian market, and has been approved by a host of organizations, including:

- The National Advisory Committee on Immunization
- The Canadian Paediatric Society
- The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada
- The Society of Gynecologic Oncologists of Canada

The HPV vaccine has strong support in the medical community based on its safety and effectiveness in preventing cervical cancer, genital warts and other detrimental effects of the Human Papillomavirus.

HPV: What it means for Canadian women each year

- 450 deaths from cervical cancer
- 1100 new diagnoses of cervical cancer
- 177,000 new cases of low grade CIN
- 52,000 new cases of CIN 2-3 (Grades 2 – 3, considered to more serious)
- 36,000 new cases of genital warts

Note: CIN is the abnormal growth of precancerous cells in the cervix

The National Advisory Committee on Immunization recommends that all Canadian girls and women aged 9 to 26 should be vaccinated to protect against HPV. Women over the age of 26 may also be considered.

Recently, several provincial governments in Canada have begun to offer the vaccination to school-aged girls. Scientific evidence has shown that the body's positive immune response to the vaccine is stronger in girls in this age group than it is for girls in their later teenage years. Additionally, the vaccine is most effective if it is administered before the onset of sexual activity. Sexual activity is defined not only as penetrative sexual intercourse, but also skin-to-skin sexual contact, such as the external touching of the genital area.

Vaccination with GARDASIL, the HPV vaccine, does not take the place of Pap tests. A Pap test looks for abnormal cells in the lining of the cervix before they have the chance to become precancerous or cervical cancer. Pap tests have been proven to help save lives.

Media Contact
Marie Sanderson
Communications Advisor
416.967.8554