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Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine for Grade 8 Girls

(Fact sheet is available in many languages. See http://www.toronto.ca/health/immunization_children/index.htm)

What is Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?

- HPV is a common virus that can lead to genital warts and cancer of the cervix, vagina, vulva (area around the vagina), penis, anus, head and neck.

What is the link between HPV and cervical cancer / genital warts?

- In some people, HPV infection can lead to cancer or warts. HPV causes almost all cases of cervical cancer in Canada.
- Two HPV types cause over 70% of cervical cancers and two other types cause over 90% of genital warts in Canada.

How is HPV spread?

- HPV is most commonly spread by skin to skin contact during intimate sexual activity with an infected partner.
- Some people never get symptoms but they still carry the virus and can infect their sexual partner(s).

What are the symptoms of HPV infection?

- Most HPV infections do not have any symptoms. Symptoms can also occur months after exposure.
- Genital warts caused by HPV are usually painless but may be itchy and uncomfortable. Warts can be small and often have a cauliflower-like appearance.
- In women, warts can occur on the vulva (vaginal lips), on the cervix (entrance to the uterus), anus, thighs, and in the mouth.
- In men, warts can be on the penis, scrotum, thighs, anus, and in the mouth.

How are HPV infections detected?

- In females, Pap tests can detect changes on the cervix caused by HPV infection. In males and females, warts can be detected by examining the skin and genital area.

Can HPV be treated?

- In healthy people, the HPV infection usually clears on its own without progressing to cancer.
- Warts and changes on the cervix that do not go away can be treated with chemical preparations, liquid nitrogen, laser or surgery. Treatments will remove the warts but do not remove the virus from your body. Warts can recur since there is no cure for HPV.
- Antibiotics are not effective in treating HPV.

How can I reduce the spread of HPV infection?

- Get vaccinated. The vaccine recommended for grade 8 girls prevents infection by the four types of HPV infection which cause most cervical cancers and genital warts.
- Avoid sexual contact with an infected person; there is always some risk of HPV infection during intimate skin to skin contact.

Can HPV infection be prevented?

- A vaccine named Gardasil[®] is now available that prevents infection against four types of HPV that cause most of the genital warts and cancers of the cervix.

Fact Sheet

Is the vaccine safe?

- Yes, studies show that it is safe. Countries, including Canada, where the vaccine is used, continue to monitor its safety. Serious side effects are rare.

Who should get the HPV vaccine Gardasil®?

- Gardasil® is recommended for females between 9 and 26 years of age. This vaccine is free for grade 8 girls.
- The vaccine is also licensed (but not publicly funded) for males nine to 26 years of age. The vaccine is most effective if it is given before any type of sexual contact.

What are the side effects of the vaccine?

- The most common side effects are pain, swelling, itchiness and redness at the injection site.
- Headache, fever, nausea and dizziness can also occur. Other less common side effects include throat spasms, vomiting and diarrhea, high blood pressure, vaginal bleeding and reduced arm movement where the shot was given.
- Severe allergic reactions are rare. Get medical attention immediately if you develop hives, wheezing, breathing difficulty or swelling of the face or mouth.

Who should not get the vaccine?

- Anyone who has had an allergic reaction to a previous shot of Gardasil® or is allergic to yeast, aluminium, polysorbate 80, L-histidine or sodium borate should not receive the vaccine.
- The vaccine has not been properly tested in girls under age nine or in pregnant women.

How many shots of the vaccine do I need?

- Studies have shown that three shots provide complete protection for at least five years. The shots have to be given within a six months period.
- The second shot is given at least one month after the first and the third shot is normally given six months after the first shot.

How can I get the vaccine?

- Toronto Public Health offers free HPV vaccine to grade 8 girls in school-based clinics and at clinics at civic centres.
- Grade 9 girls, who received at least one HPV shot in grade 8, can receive the remaining shots of the vaccine free at our civic centre clinics.
- Anyone else who wants the vaccine has to pay for it.
- For more information, speak to your health care provider. The total cost for three shots is approximately \$500. Some health insurance plans cover this cost.

Do women who get the vaccine still need to have Pap tests to screen for cervical cancer?

- Yes. Sexually active females who receive the vaccine still require regular Pap tests.
- The HPV vaccine protects against two HPV types that can cause cervical cancer.
- It is still possible for women who have been vaccinated to be infected with another rare HPV type that may cause cancer.

Where can I find more information?

- Talk to your doctor or health care provider, visit our website www.toronto.ca/health or call Toronto Public Health Immunization Information Line at 416-392-1250.