



# AAP Immunization Resources

## Preteen Immunization: Talking to Your Parents about the HPV Vaccine

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) can cause genital warts and some types of cancer. Doctors recommend ALL preteens and teens - both guys and girls - finish the HPV vaccine series before they have sex for the first time.

Here are some important facts on HPV disease and the vaccine. Plus, if you'd like to talk to your parents about HPV vaccine, check out these tips on how to make that conversation less awkward.

### What should I know about HPV and the HPV vaccine?

- HPV is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Both girls and guys can catch HPV from having sex (vaginal, oral, anal,) and intimate skin-to-skin contact.
- Most people who get HPV do so within 2-3 years of their first sexual contact.<sup>1</sup>
- HPV causes genital warts and cancers of the cervix, mouth, throat, anus, and genitals. Not good! HPV vaccine can prevent most of these problems.
- Before having sex for the first time is the best time to get the HPV vaccine! Note: Even someone who waits until marriage for sex and only has one partner can still get HPV.<sup>2</sup>
- All girls and guys should get the HPV vaccine at age 11 to 12 years old.
- The HPV vaccine is given as 3 shots in a 6-month period. (Yes, you will need all 3 shots for the vaccine to work!)
- The HPV vaccine is not a replacement for using condoms to protect against other STIs or pregnancy.

### I'm not having sex, so how can I tell my parents I want HPV vaccine without them thinking I am?

Are you wondering how you'll bring up the topic of HPV with your parents without them thinking you are already having sex or planning to have sex? Here's a good conversation starter:

*"You've probably heard that doctors are recommending that kids my age get the HPV vaccine. I think I should get it to protect me when I'm older. People need all 3 doses before being exposed to the virus in order to be fully protected, and it works better at age 11-12.<sup>3</sup> That's why this vaccine is needed now, even though I'm not having sex or even thinking about it."*

In case it comes up, you can let your parents know a study showed teens and preteens who got the HPV vaccine were not more likely to have sex than those who did not get the vaccine.<sup>4</sup>

### I'm embarrassed to talk to my parents about HPV because it is related to sex.

Talking about sex with anyone can make some people nervous (adults, too)! You might feel *especially* nervous talking to your parents...that is totally normal. Your parents may be nervous too, or they might be glad that you have brought up this topic and impressed that you are taking an interest in your own health. Try to remember that your parents care about you and want you to be healthy and safe!

Here are some additional tips for bringing up a conversation that might be a bit uncomfortable:

- Explain where you heard about HPV vaccine, or what you heard about it, and ask a question such as, "Is this true?" or "What do you think of this vaccine?"
- Be honest about how this topic makes you feel.
- Begin talking to your parents at an appropriate time (when everyone is calm and in a good mood, and in a place with some privacy).
- If the opportunity presents itself, this may be a good time to talk about sexual health with your parents.
- If you are too nervous, you could try just talking about the fact that HPV vaccine can prevent cancer in the future.

<sup>1</sup> Moscicki AB. HPV infections in adolescents. 207. *Disease Markers*, 23, 4, 229-34.

<sup>2</sup> Human Papillomavirus. Pink Book. CDC. Available at: <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/downloads/hpv.pdf>. Accessed April 9, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Food and Drug Administration. Highlights of prescribing information. Gardasil (human papillomavirus quadrivalent [types 6, 11, 16 and 18]). 2011. Available at <http://www.fda.gov/downloads/biologicsbloodvaccines/vaccines/approvedproducts/ucm11263.pdf>. Accessed April 5, 2013.

<sup>4</sup> Bednarczyk RA, Davis R, Ault K, Orenstein W, Omer Saad. Sexual Activity-Related Outcomes After Human Papillomavirus Vaccination of 11- to 12-Year-Olds. 2012. *Pediatrics*. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2012/10/10/peds.2012-1516.abstract> (login may be required)