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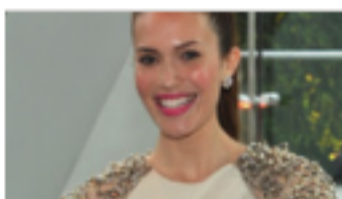
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Important facts about cervical cancer

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Rx for Health

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In the U.S. alone this year, almost 13,000 cases of invasive cervical cancer will be diagnosed, with more than 4,000 deaths because of this tragic and preventable cancer. An effective HPV vaccination program can greatly reduce the rates of cervical cancer in this country.

In recent months, the news has featured stories about a vaccine called Gardasil that was approved several years ago by the Food and Drug Administration for prevention of disease caused by HPV (clinical name is human papilloma virus). Gardasil is recently approved for boys and girls. The FDA has recently licensed a second vaccine, Cervarix, and both are shown to effectively prevent HPV infection.

Studies have shown that both vaccines are nearly 100 percent effective in protecting females who have not already been exposed to the covered types of HPV. HPV infection is prevalent in the population and is sexually transmitted.

There are many subtypes of HPV, the most common being types 6, 11, 16 and 18. Types 6 and 11 are more commonly associated with genital warts. Types 16 and 18 are responsible for the vast majority of cervical cancers.

Vaccination before the onset of sexual activity most effectively prevents cervical cancer later in life. The Centers for Disease Control recommend that girls age 11 and 12 receive the HPV vaccination, with a catch-up vaccination recommended for girls and women ages 13-26. Girls as young as 9 years old can be safely vaccinated.

The American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists supports these recommendations. Certainly, girls younger than 12 or 13 might not completely comprehend the facts and recommendations behind the vaccine, but this might also be true for a host of other recommended vaccines.

HPV vaccination is safe. Although any vaccine can pose a risk, the Food and Drug Administration and the Centers for Disease Control have extensively studied these vaccines and have concluded that they are both safe and effective. Research by the Institute of Medicine found no links between immunization and some serious conditions that have raised concerns, including diabetes and autism.

The vaccines do not cover every strain of HPV, and patients should still have regular Pap smear screenings.

ACOG represents 56,000 OB-GYNs and partners in women's health and places women's health first. Facts are important, especially when debating the health of women and girls.

For further understanding of this and other important issues concerning women's health, contact your OB-GYN or visit the ACOG website at acog.org.

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