

What Your Teens Should Know about HPV and the HPV Vaccination

As they grow, teenagers become more curious about sex and it is important that they are equipped with the right information to promote healthy behaviors. This includes information about common STIs (STDs)—how to prevent them and how to deal with them. Although not as widely known, the most common STI in the US is Human Papillomavirus (HPV). According to the CDC, as of 2018, there were 43 million infections of HPV among youth in their late teens and early 20s. Most with HPV are asymptomatic and do not know they have the virus, which is why it is important to educate early on how to prevent it. This tool guides you in equipping teens and young adults with the facts about HPV and how to prevent it.

WE START WITH “WHAT IS HPV”

- As stated above, Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) is the most common STI in the US. There are many different types of HPV. Some types can cause health problems like genital warts and cancers. It is also important to note that this is different from HIV and HSV (herpes).

HOW CAN IT BE SPREAD?

- HPV is spread through having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has the virus. A person with HPV can pass the infection to someone else even when they are asymptomatic.

IS THAT THE VIRUS THAT CAN CAUSE SOME FORM OF CANCER?

- Yes, HPV can cause cervical and other cancers including penile or vaginal cancer. It can also cause cancer in the back of the throat. However, cancer can take years to develop after a person gets HPV.

SO HOW CAN MY TEEN AVOID HPV OR PREVENT HPV?

- The best advice would be for them to get vaccinated. The HPV vaccine is safe, and effective and can protect against diseases caused by HPV. When your teen gets to their early 20s, especially if they are women, it is also advisable for them to get screened for cervical cancer. Routine screening helps to prevent cervical cancer.

CAN ANYONE GET THE HPV VACCINE?

- HPV vaccination is recommended for all preteens (boys and girls) at ages 11 and 12. It is also recommended for everyone through the age of 26 years that is not already vaccinated. So it is perfectly safe for your teen.
- Vaccination is not recommended for everyone older than 26 years. However, some unvaccinated adults may decide to get the HPV vaccine after speaking with their healthcare provider.

LETS SAY, THEY MAY HAVE CONTRACTED HPV. HOW WILL THEY KNOW AND IS THERE TREATMENT?

- This is the tricky part. Unfortunately, there are no tests to find out a person’s “HPV status.” There are HPV tests that can screen for cervical cancer but these tests are used for screening only women aged 30 years and older. These tests are not recommended for men, adolescents, or women under the age of 30 years.
- Treatment-wise, There is no treatment for the virus itself. However, there are treatments for the health problems that it can cause, like Genital warts. There are also pre-cervical cancer treatments available.

WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION IF I NEED IT?

- You can visit the CDC website for more information or discuss with your primary care provider.

