



Vaccine big breakthrough in women's health

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If you could prevent cancer with a simple vaccine...would you?

Of course you would. And that is just the scenario women are faced with now that there is Gardasil -- a new immunization to prevent HPV -- Human Papilloma Virus. HPV, which is transmitted through sexual contact, is closely linked with 70 percent of cervical cancers. You, your daughter, sister and friends can now stop this potentially lethal virus in its tracks.

It really is as simple as getting a shot.

For years, the general public didn't know that cervical cancer is, in most cases, caused by a virus. There are over 30 types of HPV. Gardasil protects against the four most common and dangerous types -- the four most likely to cause cervical cancer and genital warts.

Who should get vaccinated?

Gardasil vaccine is recommended for females 9 to 26-years old -- the age range when most women are first exposed to a cancer-causing HPV type. Many contract the virus within the first 2-3 years of having sexual contact -- intercourse isn't necessary to contract this virus. Because the linings of the reproductive tracts are still forming during the teen years, it's easier for girls to get certain infections such as HPV. Therefore, the vaccine is most beneficial before contracting HPV, so the best time for a girl to be vaccinated is before she has had any kind of sexual contact. If a girl is already sexually active, Gardasil is still a good idea, and can offer significant protection from other types of HPV.

So, what are the chances of contracting HPV?

Statistics show there are six million new cases of HPV infection in the United States every year. By age 50, 80 percent of women have contracted HPV. So, it is very likely that you or someone you know has this virus.

The good news is, if we're proactive in immunizing our daughters now, we should see a dramatic drop in the number of cervical cancers within 30 years. That's actually great news!

Whether vaccinated with Gardasil or not, it is important for all women to continue with regular cervical cancer screenings (Pap tests). Early detection is the best way to defeat cervical cancer.

To find out if you're infected, have a routine Pap test. Many women have no symptoms, and discover they have the virus with an abnormal Pap or through the formation of genital warts. We recommend that women start annual Pap testing within three years of becoming sexually active or by age 21.

For information on HPV, the Gardasil vaccination series (3 injections over 6 months), and/or questions about whether this vaccine is right for you or a family member, please contact one of the North Basin Medical Clinics.

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