

# Vaccinate Against Cancer

This year's Annual Report to the Nation on the Status of Cancer shows overall the U.S. is making progress in lowering cancer rates for the most common types of cancer; lung, colon, anal, breast and prostate. That's the good news. But rates of Human Papillomavirus (HPV) related cancers like cervical cancers are elevated. Other HPV related cancers include oral, laryngeal, and oropharyngeal cancers in both men and women.

Quite shocking considering that a vaccine exists to prevent the viral infection that can trigger these diseases.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends routine vaccination of adolescent girls and boys ages 11 or 12 years with three doses of HPV vaccine. Currently, only Washington D.C. and Virginia mandate HPV immunization for school age children. South Dakota recommends the vaccine for both boys and girls.

These shots are shown to be effective at controlling the most common strains of HPV responsible for cervical cancer, and many cancer experts and public health officials see the vaccine as a powerful tool in keeping rates of these cancers down. Since the vaccine was made available in 2006, infection with HPV tied to cervical cancer fell by more than half in teen girls.

"Even now, only about a third of US girls ages 13 to 17 have had the full series of shots that prevent HPV infection, despite repeated reports that show the vaccine is safe and effective," states Dr. Tom Frieden, director of the CDC. Other countries, including places like Rwanda, have higher vaccination rates than the U.S.

About 19,000 cancers caused by HPV infections occur in women each year, according to CDC reports, with cervical cancers being the most common. About 8,000 cancers caused by HPV occur in men each year; throat cancers are the most common.

The CDC estimates that if coverage with the full three-dose course of HPV vaccine were increased to 80%, 53,000 cases of cervical cancer could be prevented in the lifetime of girls currently aged 12 and younger. For every year that coverage remains at its current level, an additional 4,400 of these girls will go on to develop cervical cancer.

Yankton School District Nurse Judy Heine, RN, hopes that

education about the vaccine will increase vaccination rates in our area. Each year Judy diligently reviews immunization records for all school age children in the Yankton School District. Parents of all incoming freshman students receive an immunization update form with recommended immunizations and boosters. Judy recommends the series of HPV immunizations to all boys and girls who have not already had the vaccine. She estimates that of this year's class only four girls received the vaccine, and no boys have reported receiving it.

Milwaukee pediatrician and designated spokesperson for the American Academy of Pediatrics Rodney Willoughby says there's a very good reason to push to get preteens vaccinated. "If in 20 years time, my daughter, with two children at home, develops cervical cancer, and I didn't give her the vaccine, I'm going to be looking pretty hard in the mirror at myself."

#### Seeking more information?

Go online to [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

Talk with your child's health care provider

Contact Yankton School District Nurse Judy Heine, RN

#### Weigh-In at hervoiceonline

Do you think the HPV vaccine should be a required vaccine for all school age boys and girls?

Yes

No

■ By Melissa Bader



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