Gardasil for boys?

By ACSH Staff — May 10, 2010

Drugmaker Merck has begun marketing its HPV vaccine Gardasil to boys, a move the Chicago Tribune reports is leading to some skepticism among vaccine-wary parents.

"Some parents, many of whom were surprised to learn Gardasil is now being offered to boys, said they fear that having their children vaccinated would encourage earlier sexual activity," the Tribune reports. "Many also question its cost: [about] $390 for the series of three shots." And some parents worry about the vaccine's safety, the newspaper says.

Dr. Ross says those fears are unfounded. "Parents of children in the recommended age groups — both boys and girls — should be vaccinated before they initiate sexual activity — not just intercourse, but any kind of activity that could expose them to potentially communicable diseases. The downside to the vaccine is essentially zero."

"We know very well that giving kids protection against sexually transmitted diseases does not lead to them having sex earlier," says Dr. Whelan. "However the price of the vaccine does remain an obstacle."

Dr. Ross says it's not just girls who benefit from Gardasil. The human papillomavirus, or HPV, is associated with penile and anal genital warts, he says. There's also "substantial and accumulating evidence" linking it to oral and oropharyngeal cancer, or cancer of the mouth and throat, as well as anal and rectal cancers in both genders.