Does HPV vaccine lead to promiscuity? It does not.

By ACSH Staff — February 3, 2014

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a leading cause of cervical cancer in women and the only cause of genital warts in both sexes. Fortunately, these ills can now be largely prevented by a series of vaccinations that are typically given before a boy or girl becomes sexually active. Some parents are reluctant to have their children, especially girls, vaccinated because they are concerned that immunity against the virus will encourage promiscuous behavior, or lead to the misperception that the vaccine protects against a variety of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

But, they should fear not. A new study [1] just published in the journal Pediatrics, and also covered [2] by Reuters addresses this issue head on. Dr. Jessica Kahn of the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center and colleagues studied 339 young women between 13 and 21 years of age. At the time the study commenced, they were receiving the first of three installments of the HPV vaccine.

At that time, and also 2 and 6 months later, the participants completed questionnaires about their demographic characteristics, knowledge and attitudes about HPV vaccination, their risk perceptions (perceived risk of STIs other than HPV and the need for safe sexual practices after vaccination), and their sexual behavior.

Approximately 43 percent of the young women were sexually inexperienced at the initiation of the study. At 6 months, the researchers found that the girls who were 16-21 years old and who inappropriately thought the HPV vaccine protected them against other STIs were still less likely to initiate sexual activity that is, they didn’t change their behavior. For the 58 percent who were sexually experienced, their risk perceptions at baseline were not linked to later sexual behavior with respect to either the number of sexual partners or to the likelihood they would use condoms.

Dr. Kahn told Reuters "There are so many contributing factors to whether an adolescent decides to have sex or not, and whether they decide to limit their number of partners or use condoms. Getting a vaccine probably just plays a very, very small role in their decisions."
ACSH’s Dr. Gilbert Ross agrees This study substantiates the importance of having youngsters of both genders vaccinated against HPV. The HPV-linked cancers are unique in that they can be prevented by simple vaccinations there is no valid reason for parents to avoid them. Hopefully this will finally put this non-issue to rest.

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