Another reason to get your HPV vaccine: preeclampsia!

By ACSH Staff — February 14, 2014

Over the past few years, the breadth of illnesses linked to infection with human papillomavirus (HPV) has grown substantially. This is, paradoxically, a good thing, since although HPV is the most common sexually-transmitted infection among girls and women, we have a vaccine (two, in fact) that offer highly-effective protection against the virus.

There are four subtypes of HPV that are causally-linked to various cancers and pre-cancers. The 2 most common are types 16 and 18, and the vaccines we have Merck’s Gardasil and GSK’s Cervarix are highly effective at preventing recipients from infection with these, which cause cancer of the cervix and vagina in females, penis in boys, and oropharyngeal and rectal cancers in anyone. They are also known to cause genital warts in both genders.

Now a new study published in the Journal of Obstetrics & Gynecology has detected a significant relationship between infection with the high-risk HPV types and preeclampsia [1]. The latter condition occurs only in pregnancy, and is manifested by high blood pressure, protein in the urine, and neuromuscular irritability. While in and of itself it is linked to premature births and even fetal loss, it’s main fear is the progression to eclampsia, a full-blown obstetrical emergency requiring immediate delivery of the baby to save both mom and newborn.

The study matched 314 pregnant women with high-risk HPV (HR-HPV) with twice that number of women with no HPV infection. The results were that the HR-HPV infected moms-to-be had twice the incidence of preeclampsia as did the negative women. Further, the rate of fetal loss miscarriage was also significantly higher among HR-HPV+ women, although the study was not aimed at that population so no significant conclusions were drawn. The authors, a group from the University of Texas Medical Branch, Galveston, advise a larger, randomized study to establish a cause-and-effect, thus adding protection against preeclampsia and possibly miscarriage to the list of HPV-vaccine-preventable conditions.

ACSH’s Dr. Gil Ross had this comment: Here we go again: Get your HPV vaccine, girls! And boys too! The vaccine is safe, and highly protective, and can prevent all sorts of bad diseases, so why wait? In fact, the vaccine is largely ineffective if administered after HR-HPV is acquired, so get those shots in before sexual experience makes it a moot point. Mythology about the safety of the
vaccine, or whether it promotes earlier sexual experience, should be ignored!

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