Merck’s new nine-valent HPV vaccine

By ACSH Staff — February 24, 2014

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends that all boys and girls receive the HPV vaccine before they become sexually active. Currently, there are two HPV vaccines approved a quadrivalent HPV vaccine (Gardasil produced by Merck), which prevents pre-cancers, cervical, vulvar, vaginal and anal cancers and genital warts; and a bivalent HPV vaccine (Cervarix produced by GlaxoSmithKline), which protects against cervical cancer and pre-cancers. Both vaccines target the viral sub-types most commonly implicated in causation of the serious conditions linked to persistent viral infection.

And Merck is now filing [1] for a license for a new version of the HPV vaccine. This new version is for a nine-valent HPV vaccine. However, this prevention-over-cure angle is not taking hold with parents. Many parents fear the vaccine will encourage either earlier sexual experience, or sexual promiscuity, in their children, although studies have [2] shown this is not the case. The other factor is that doctors fail to [3] communicate appropriate information to parents and their children regarding the important benefits and near-absence of risks of the HPV vaccine.

For these reasons, vaccination rates have remained abysmally low. According to the CDC, vaccination rates among girls are only at 33 percent. The rate among boys is even lower.

ACSH’s Ariel Savransky says, As we’ve been saying all along, we have a cancer vaccine, we should be using it. If this new nine-valent vaccine is approved, that’s even more of a reason to make sure children receive this important vaccination. And doctors should make sure to routinely recommend this vaccine to their adolescent patients before the onset of sexual activity.

Dr. Gilbert Ross goes into [4] more detail as to why this vaccine is so highly underused in his 2013 op-ed on the subject, HPV vaccine: safe, prevents cancer so why is it so rarely used?

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