

# It's not about sex. It's about cancer.

By ACSH Staff — August 20, 2014



The HPV vaccine is one of only two vaccines in the world that

prevent cancer - the other being hepatitis B. Despite this, only 38 percent of adolescent girls and 14 percent of adolescent boys have received all three doses of this vaccine. ACSH trustee Dr. Paul Offit discusses the reasons behind the low vaccination rate in an [op-ed appearing](#) [1] in today's *New York Times* called Let's Not Talk About Sex.

First, it's possible that people do not understand how serious HPV is: Although about 80 percent of adolescents receive the meningococcal and Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, acellular pertussis) vaccines, people are actually more than 20 times more likely to die from HPV-associated disease than from the diseases covered by the Tdap and meningococcal vaccines combined. Second, some believe that the HPV vaccine is ineffective and protection does not last for an extended period of time. Yet research has shown that the HPV vaccine is almost 100 percent effective and safe, and [immunity is long-lasting](#) [2]. Furthermore, the concern that the HPV vaccine will increase sexual promiscuity is [unfounded as well](#) [3], as Dr. Offit says, this argument would be analogous to the claim that people who received a tetanus vaccine could run across a bed of rusty nails with impunity.

The key point that Dr. Offit makes is that this is the only vaccine that protects against sexually transmitted disease, yet the fact is that many doctors (and parents) do not want to have a conversation about sex with their 11-year old patients. One of the main reasons adolescents aren't getting the vaccine is because doctors are not recommending it strongly enough.

The bottom line is this: It's not about sex. It's about cancer.

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## Links

[1] <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/20/opinion/lets-not-talk-about-sex-HPV-vaccine.html>

[2] <http://acsh.org/2014/08/hpv-vaccination-shown-safe-effective-eight-years/>

[3] <http://acsh.org/2014/02/hpv-vaccine-lead-promiscuity/>