As HPV vaccination rates increase, cervical cancer rates decrease, study finds

By ACSH Staff — November 12, 2014

HPV (human papillomavirus), the most common sexually transmitted infection, can lead to several types of cancers, including cervical. About 79 million Americans are currently infected with HPV, and there are about 14 million new cases every year. The HPV vaccine protects against four major types of HPV, and can prevent most cases of cervical cancer (and likely other cancers as well, but those studies are only now underway), as well as genital warts.

A new study reports that the proportion of teenage girls receiving HPV vaccines is lower in states with higher rates of cervical cancer (both incidence and mortality). The findings of the study were presented at the American Association for Cancer Research (AARC) [1] conference, The Science of Cancer Health Disparities in Racial/Ethnic Minorities and the Medically Underserved.

Jennifer L. Moss, MSPH, and colleagues collected data on HPV vaccination rates from the National Immunization Survey, and collected data on cancer rates among states from the United States Cancer Statistics database. The data revealed that as HPV vaccine rates among teen girls decreased, cervical cancer incidence rates increased.

For example, Arkansas had 10.2 cases of cervical cancer per 100,000 women, while 41% of girls received the HPV vaccine. Florida also had a high rate of cervical cancer and low rates of HPV vaccinations, with 9.4 cervical cancer cases/100,000 women and 39% of girls receiving the HPV vaccine. Massachusetts, one of the states with a higher rate of HPV vaccination (69% of girls), had only 6 cases of cervical cancer/100,000 women.

Teens don’t visit their healthcare providers as often as younger children, so increasing the frequency and efficiency of preventive visits is really important for HPV vaccination and cancer prevention, said Moss. We know that a health care provider’s recommendation is the single biggest influence on whether an adolescent receives an HPV vaccine. So, we hope that the findings of our study impress upon clinicians, especially those practicing in states with higher cancer rates, that cancer prevention means recommending HPV vaccination to adolescent patients at every visit.

ACSH’s Dr. Gil Ross added, But HPV prevention should also include teen boys. After all, it takes
two to tango.