So, does the HPV vaccine encourage promiscuity? Nope.

By ACSH Staff — April 7, 2015

Since there are already quite enough problems that prevent people from getting the correct information on vaccinations, the last thing needed was another reason for people to oppose them. But, it happened anyhow. Worse still, this particular vaccine hit a whole bunch of hot buttons, which are especially sensitive in the US sexuality and promiscuity. Yet, this is exactly what has happened since the introduction of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine.

It is not surprising that there are fringe groups that believe conspiracy theories, such as the vaccine sterilizes women. It is even less surprising that when you Google hpv vaccine sterilization, the first hit is an article on the site of the always-unreliable Joe Mercola an anti-vaccine zealot who may be the biggest (and most financially successful) purveyor of junk science in the world.

But, ignoring the lunatic fringe, there was still a rational concern for some parents: Would the fact that a girl was protected against one sexually transmitted disease (STD) lead to promiscuity, and a corresponding increase in other STDs? The answer is in, and it is a resounding no.

The answer comes from a study that appeared in the April issue of JAMA Internal Medicine. Lead author Anupam B. Jena, M.D., Ph.D, an assistant professor of health care policy and medicine at Harvard Medical School and colleagues published a paper entitled Incidence of Sexually Transmitted Infections After Human Papillomavirus Vaccination Among Adolescent Females, in which they demonstrated quite convincingly that the HPV vaccine in girls does not lead to an increase in other STDs.

Unlike junk studies, which we write about constantly, this one is quite the opposite. The group nailed this one.

They examined and analyzed data from more than 200,000 females aged 12-18, during the interval between January 2005 and December 2010, and compared the rates of seven STIs (sexually-transmitted infections) between those who had been vaccinated with those who had not.

In the year following vaccination, incidence of STIs increased in both groups (this is logical, since the girls were older by the end of the study, and thus, more likely to have engaged in sexual
activity). But, the difference between the two groups was gone. The authors wrote, ... HPV vaccination was not associated with an increase in STIs [STDs] relative to growth among non vaccinated females. Similar associations held among subgroups aged 12 through 14 years and aged 15 through 18 years and among females with contraceptive use in the index quarter.

So, not only was there no difference in the rate of STDs between the two groups, but when they examined smaller, specific groups within the original study group, the trend was the same. It held true for females in different age groups. Additionally, there was no difference in contraceptive use between the groups, which is certainly a very good surrogate measure of sexual activity.

ACSH’s Dr. Josh Bloom says, Hopefully, this will put parents who were concerned about increased sexual activity following HPV vaccination at ease. The HPV vaccine is one of exactly two cancer-preventing vaccines in the world. Not only is it effective, but it protects both boys and girls against the most common STD. It is so common, that the CDC says [3], HPV is so common that nearly all sexually active men and women get the virus at some point in their lives. This study shows that there is essentially no downside to the vaccine, but the potential upside is enormous. I hope parents take note.