Study explores attitudes and beliefs about HPV

March 1 2007

The most common sexually transmitted virus in the US is genital human papillomavirus (HPV) infection, with 20 million Americans currently infected and another 6.2 million becoming infected each year. Although HPV causes serious damage to women's health, including cervical cancer, awareness of the disease is surprisingly low.

In order to understand the public's knowledge, attitudes and beliefs regarding HPV and its vaccine, and to explore their preferences regarding receipt of HPV information, research was conducted with focus groups in 2003, just before the HPV vaccine was licensed for the public. The study's findings have been published online in the journal Health Education & Behavior, the official journal of the Society for Public Health Education, published by SAGE.

Researchers found that, not only was the HPV awareness and knowledge low, the STD-associated stigma served as a barrier to participants' acceptance to the future vaccine. "Although information about HPV's high prevalence and link to cervical cancer motivated participants to learn more about HPV, it also produced fear and anxiety," write the authors Allison L. Friedman, MS and Hilda Shepeard, MBA. "The research suggests that HPV education efforts must be approached with extreme caution. Instead of focusing on HPV as an STD, communications should take a public-health approach emphasizing the high prevalence and commonality of HPV infection among sexually active adults."

Source: SAGE Publications

Citation: Study explores attitudes and beliefs about HPV (2007, March 1) retrieved 23 April 2024 from https://medicalxpress.com/news/2007-03-explores-attitudes-beliefs-hpv.html

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