

One in four California adolescent girls has had HPV vaccine

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Less than two years after the HPV vaccine was approved as a routine vaccination for girls aged 11 and older, one-quarter of California adolescent girls have started the series of shots that protect against human papillomavirus, which is strongly linked to cervical cancer.

Additionally, a majority of teen girls, parents and young women in California say they would like to have the vaccine, according to a new policy brief released today by the UCLA Center for Health Policy Research.

The brief, "One in Four California Adolescent Girls Have Had Human Papillomavirus Vaccination," represents the first data on HPV vaccine use and acceptability published for any state. As such, it is an early indicator of how a controversial vaccine — shunned by some groups over concerns about its efficacy and potential effect on sexual mores — is being accepted by the general public.

Among teen girls in California aged 13 to 17, about 378,000 out of 1,468,000 (26 percent) reported receiving at least one dose of the vaccine. Among California females aged 18 to 26, about 262,000 out of 2,273,000 (12 percent) reported receiving at least one dose of the vaccine in 2007, and 4 percent had completed the vaccine series.

Awareness and interest in the vaccine is high: 76 percent of teen girls aged 13 to 17 and 60 percent of young adult women aged 18 to 26 reported an interest in getting the HPV vaccine themselves, while 57

percent of parents of age-eligible girls reported an interest in getting the HPV vaccine for their daughters.

The HPV vaccine Gardasil was licensed for use by the Food and Drug Administration in June 2006 and recommended for routine use by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices in March 2007. The California Health Interview Survey, administered by the Center for Health Policy Research, collected data on HPV vaccine acceptance from July 2007 through March 2008.

"For so many teens and young women to be vaccinated or to suggest interest in vaccination in such a short time suggests very few barriers to acceptance," said David Grant, Ph.D., director of the California Health Interview Survey and lead author of the policy brief. "A majority of parents, teens and young women want the vaccine and perceive it to be important to their health."

The HPV virus is associated with about 90 percent of genital warts and up to 70 percent of all cervical cancers. The vaccine is administered in a series of three injections over a six-month period and targets the four HPV types most commonly associated with genital warts and cervical cancer.

Among those surveyed who had not yet had the HPV vaccine, not knowing enough about the vaccine was the main reason cited by young adult women age 18 to 26 (31 percent) and parents of age-eligible daughters (54 percent). Other frequently cited explanations included concerns about the vaccine's safety and questions about the vaccine's necessity.

Researchers noted that the findings of the policy brief do not conclusively explore reasons for non-acceptance.

"Further research is needed to understand why some are not getting the vaccine," said Nancy Breen, an economist with the Applied Research Program of the National Cancer Institute, which funded the research. "What we do know is that many girls and women are getting the vaccine. That's good news in the fight against cervical cancer."

Source: University of California - Los Angeles

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