

Study: HPV vaccine hurts less than expected

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(PhysOrg.com) -- Injections of the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine appear to be no more painful than other shots that prevent disease, according to a new study by researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

The finding follows anecdotal accounts and news stories that have emphasized the potential side effects of the HPV [vaccine](#), including reports of painful injections. That has prompted concern among public health professionals that vaccine [pain](#) may deter parents and young women from getting the vaccine or completing the recommended three-dose series.

Researchers at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health and UNC Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center found that most parents of adolescent girls reported their daughters experienced similar or less pain from [HPV vaccine](#) shots than from tetanus boosters and meningococcal vaccinations. The study, “How much will it hurt? HPV vaccine side effects and influence on completion of the three-dose regimen,” appears online in the journal *Vaccine*.

The [human papillomavirus](#) vaccine can potentially protect young women from the strains of the virus that cause the majority of cervical cancers, several other deadly cancers and genital warts. Yet only about 37 percent of adolescent girls in the United States who are eligible for the vaccine have initiated the three-dose vaccination series.

“Some stories about HPV vaccine [side effects](#) and pain have been

downright scary. However, most parents in our study reported their daughters experienced the same amount of pain or even less pain from the HPV vaccine compared to these other vaccines,” said UNC postdoctoral fellow Paul L. Reiter, Ph.D., corresponding author of the study.

The team also found that pain from HPV vaccination was not a reason behind failure to complete the vaccine regimen. Daughters who experienced pain from HPV vaccination were just as likely to complete all three doses on time as those who did not experience pain.

Noel T. Brewer, Ph.D., senior investigator on the study, UNC Lineberger member and assistant professor of health behavior and health education in the public health school, said the researchers hoped their findings could increase young women’s initiation and completion of the vaccine series by dispelling the myth that it is unusually painful.

“It’s important for parents and health care providers to be aware of these findings,” he said. “Doctors and parents can now make better informed decisions about giving [adolescent girls](#) the HPV vaccine.” He said the take home message from the study findings is, “Getting the HPV vaccine hurts less than you think.”

Along with Brewer and Reiter, other study co-authors were Sami Gottlieb, M.D., with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; Annie-Laurie McRee, a doctoral student in maternal and child health in the public health school; and Jennifer Smith, Ph.D, research associate professor of epidemiology in the public health school and a UNC Lineberger member.

Provided by University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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