

For one woman, HPV vaccine was a 'no-brainer'

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Deb McAlister

Deb McAlister got the shot for her two granddaughters to shield them from cervical cancer.

(HealthDay)—For Deb McAlister, it was a simple, obvious choice.

McAlister was in charge of raising her three grandchildren—two girls and a boy—when the [vaccine](#) for HPV, the [human papillomavirus](#), first came out. "I got the [HPV vaccine](#) for my granddaughters as soon as it became available," she said.

"It was a no-brainer for me," McAlister said. "I mean this vaccine helps to prevent one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases [and some cervical cancers]. Who wouldn't want to protect their child from something like that?"

She noted that "neither [of the girls] was sexually active at the time, and neither had any side effects."

A brochure in the doctor's waiting room was what first tipped her off to the availability of the HPV vaccine. The doctor recommended the vaccine for both of McAlister's granddaughters, but particularly for the younger girl, Krystal, because she'd already had a number of [health problems](#) and preventing infections was especially important.

"For Krystal, it was a simple thing," McAlister said. "She was born with two [heart defects](#). By the time she was old enough for this vaccine, she'd had 14 separate surgical procedures, spent over 400 days in the hospital and had two strokes. She had more than enough sickness for a lifetime—why wouldn't we give her a vaccine that might prevent cancer or even a minor sexually transmitted disease?"

Krystal is now 21, healthy and living independently, her grandmother said.

For the older granddaughter, Amber, McAlister described the decision as more "visceral" because Amber's biological family has a history of cervical cancer. "I didn't want Amber's life derailed by anything," she said. Now 22, Amber is a senior in college, majoring in law enforcement and criminal justice.

McAlister's grandson, Kameron, is reaching the age at which the vaccine will become an option for him, and she said she plans to have him vaccinated as well, at his doctor's recommendation.

The push to have pre-adolescents vaccinated against HPV has aroused the ire of some, who contend that youths who've had the vaccine will think they're immune to sexually transmitted diseases and become more sexually active.

But McAlister has her own answer to the controversy.

"The vaccine isn't about sex," she said. "It's about keeping our children safe from a disease that's painful, embarrassing, and can be life-threatening. If the shot protected them from lung cancer instead of [cervical cancer](#), would you give it to them? If you would, then there's no reason not to give them this one."

More information: There's much more on preventing cervical cancer [here](#).

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