

Why the HPV vaccine is important for preteens

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Gardasil vaccine and box. Image: Wikipedia

If you could protect your children now from a potential cancer later in life, would you? A recent survey conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reveals that an increasing number of parents are hesitant to have their children vaccinated for HPV. And many researchers believe that misinformation could play a role.

Dr. Gregory Poland, director of the Mayo Clinic Vaccine Research Group, says children who are vaccinated against HPV before they are sexually active are protected long before they are exposed to the virus.

HPV, or [human papillomavirus](#), is nearly universal.

"Essentially, every sexually active person in the U.S. will be infected with the [virus](#)," says Dr. Poland.

While most infections will resolve on their own, some may cause a variety of warts or cancer.

"Almost all of the oral cancers are caused by HPV. Almost all of the cervical cancers, vaginal cancers, anal cancers, penile cancers—these are preventable."

These cancers are preventable with a highly effective vaccine. The CDC recommends two doses of the HPV vaccine for 11- and 12-year-old boys and girls.

"You can start as young as 9 years old. The typical time to give it is as you're entering into adolescence — in that 11-, 12-year-old time frame."

Dr. Poland says the point is to immunize and protect [children](#) before they become sexually active.

"There's a vaccine that will protect them from a lifelong infection, and it's safe and effective."

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