

dear doctor

Sarah H. Krauss is a board-certified gynecologist and obstetrician with Physicians' Primary Care of Southwest Florida.

## **HPV Vaccine 101**

*80% of adults will acquire HPV before the age of 50*

**Q: I've heard I should get my daughter the HPV vaccine. Can you tell me more about it?**

**A:** The Human Papilloma Virus has been in the news a lot recently. It's a virus that we now understand to cause most cervical cancers and genital warts.

*80% of sexually active adults will acquire a genital tract HPV infection before the age of 50. Most people probably won't know they have it because the infection initially has no symptoms. Men, especially, usually don't know that they are infected.*

If you have HPV, it can usually be detected through your annual pap smear screening. If your pap smear result is abnormal, your doctor might then test for the presence of HPV.

The virus is spread through genital contact with someone who has HPV. Intercourse isn't necessary to spread it, just contact.

In recent years, a vaccine has been developed, called Gardasil. It protects against four types of the virus. These four types are responsible for 70 percent of all cases of cervical cancers and 90 percent of all cases of genital warts.

Here are some common questions my patients ask me:

**Q: Is there any other way to prevent the spread of HPV?**

**A:** *Abstinence will prevent the spread of HPV. Not even condom use can prevent the spread of HPV in sexually active people.*

**Q: Who should be vaccinated?**

**A:** Currently, the FDA has approved Gardasil for girls and women ages 9-26. Its effectiveness is currently being studied in other populations such as women over the age of 26 and in men. *The vaccine is recommended by The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and by The American Cancer Society.*

**Q: If I already have HPV, should I still get vaccinated?**

**A:** Unfortunately, it is impossible to test which type of HPV you have; however, it is unlikely that you have all four types covered by Gardasil. Getting vaccinated may protect you against the types of HPV you may be exposed to in the future. Of course, I recommend everyone discuss their individual cases with their physicians.

**Q: Does Gardasil prevent the spread of any other infections?**

**A:** No. Even after being vaccinated, women are still at risk for other sexually transmitted infections such as HIV, hepatitis B and C, syphilis, chlamydia and gonorrhea.

**Q: What are the side effects?**

**A:** The vaccine is considered safe and has been well tolerated. Possible side effects include pain, swelling, itching and redness at the injection site, fever, nausea, dizziness, vomiting and fainting.

**Q: Is there anyone who shouldn't get vaccinated?**

**A:** Pregnant women.

**Q: Do I still need annual pap smears if I have received Gardasil?**

**A:** Yes. There are many other types of HPV not included in the Gardasil vaccine that can still cause cervical cancer. Pap smears are the best way to detect cervical cancer.

**Q: Where can I get the vaccine?**

**A:** Most physician offices have Gardasil available for their patients. For more information, talk with your doctor.