



Campaign Aims to Dramatically Increase HPV Vaccination Rates for Pre-Teens

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The **Jewish Healthcare Foundation**, in partnership with the Eye and Ear Foundation, have kicked off a national public awareness campaign aimed at medical providers and parents, urging them to have their pre-teen boys and girls vaccinated against the human papillomavirus.

“The goal is to have 80 percent of all boys and girls against HPV,” said Joan Cates, a professor at the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill, whose research focuses on HPV-related diseases. “Right now we’re down at the level of 30 percent and not increasing, so there’s a long way to go between the 30 percent and the 80 percent.”

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted disease in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and infects approximately 79 million Americans each year. The HPV vaccine was approved by the FDA in 2006 for females ages 9 through 26. It was approved for males in 2009.

Cates said ideally, the vaccine is given to 11 and 12 year olds.

“The vaccine is really a marvel,” Cates said. “It protects against human papilloma virus, the types that cause cancers in both boys and girls. The best time to get it before they get exposed to the virus, when they become sexually active at some point in their lives.”

Most strains of HPV go away by themselves, but certain strains can lead to genital warts and potentially deadly cervical, genital and oral cancers. The HPV vaccination rate is on the decline, according to Cates. She said health care providers should be recommending it to parents, but currently family physicians and pediatricians aren’t having that conversation with parents, and parents aren’t bringing it up either.

“It’s had a lot of discussion, the vaccine, because it protects a sexually transmitted infection,” she said. “That’s often a hard conversation between the health care provider, the parent and the pre-teen, so what we’re trying to do is to figure out how to have better conversations.”

The campaign launch event in Pittsburgh featured a panel of medical and public health professionals. Details of the public awareness campaign, and how the effort will reach out to parents and health care providers, will be released at a later date.