



Children's Health Update

Back to School Means Recommended Vaccines for Preteens Too

by Ruth Stefanos, M.D.

(NAPS)—As a pediatrician, I hear many questions from parents. As their children grow from babies to adolescents, so does the number of questions they have about how to continue protecting their kids. This makes sense, since we are all navigating a changing world with social media, peer pressure, and more homework and scheduled activities. Parents are juggling these things every day, and the bottom line is that parents want to know how they can protect their kids.

One of the most important things we know to protect your kids—now and as they grow—is vaccination. While most parents are familiar with getting their babies vaccinated, they might not realize that there are vaccinations specifically for preteens that can protect them against serious diseases like cancer and meningitis.

HPV vaccination is given when kids are about 11–12 years old to protect them from ever getting the HPV virus that can cause cancers later in life. Both preteen boys and girls need this vaccine now, before they are ever exposed to the virus. Stopping that virus in its tracks can protect them from things like cervical cancer in women, and head and neck cancer in men.

While it can be hard for parents to look at their preteens and see the young adult they will become, vaccinating them now means not having to worry about HPV-related cancers as they grow up. We know that this virus is common—about 13 million people in the United States, including teens, become infected with



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HPV each year. Every year in the United States, HPV causes about 36,000 cases of cancer in both men and women. This is why I strongly recommend that parents vaccinate their kids. I also know that the HPV vaccine has a reassuring safety record that's backed by over 15 years of monitoring and research. What's amazing is that we are really starting to see the impact of this vaccine. HPV infections and cervical precancers have dropped substantially since 2006, when HPV vaccines were first used in the United States.

I feel very confident telling parents that today is the day to get their kids protected with HPV vaccination. It's a good reminder that while you can't stop kids from growing up, you can protect them against cancer later. Back to school health-care visits are a great time to take this step to protect them. Please call to schedule your kids' appointment today. You can learn more at www.cdc.gov/HPV.

• *Dr. Stefanos is a medical officer in the Division of Viral Diseases, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).*