

Tips for School Nurses on Talking with Parents about HPV Vaccine

Situation or Concern

Try Saying...

Effective First Discussion

Use “bundled” language. HPV is framed as important and no different than other adolescent vaccines.

“Your child is due for vaccinations to protect against pertussis, polio, measles, mumps, rubella, meningitis, HPV cancers, chickenpox and hepatitis B. Schedule an appointment with your child’s provider to get these taken care of.”

Ineffective First Discussion

HPV is perceived as different, optional, unimportant.



Don't Say...

“Your child is required to receive [list of vaccinations] for entry to school. It is also recommended that she receives the meningococcal and HPV vaccines.”

Addressing Catch-Up Population

Presumption of vaccine uptake, conveys message of importance.

“I see your child hasn’t gotten the HPV vaccine yet. You should definitely schedule an appointment today!”

“Why does my child need this vaccine?”

“The HPV vaccine is very important because it prevents cancer. I want your child to be protected against cancer, so I recommend you make an appointment to get your child vaccinated.”

“My child will wait for marriage/won’t be exposed.”

“HPV is so common that almost everyone will be infected at some time. When your child marries, she could still catch HPV from her husband. He might have been infected before he ever met her.”

“Why now? Can this wait until my child is older?”

“HPV vaccination provides the best protection when given at age 11 or 12, which is why I recommend getting your child vaccinated as soon as possible.”

Situation or Concern

Try Saying...

“The HPV vaccine will be a green light for sexual activity.”

“Studies have shown that getting the HPV vaccine has absolutely no impact on sexual behavior. It doesn’t make kids more likely to have sex, or to have sex at a younger age.”

(Sources include Liddon NC, Am J Prev Med 2012 42:44; Bednarczyk RA, Pediatrics 2012 130:798; Jena AB JAMA Intern Med 2015)

“Would you get your child vaccinated?”

“Yes, I had my child (or grandchild, niece, friend’s son, etc.) vaccinated because I think preventing cancer is very important.”

“Side Effects”

“The HPV vaccine has been carefully studied by medical and scientific experts. The HPV vaccine has been shown to be very effective and very safe. Like other shots, most side effects are mild, primarily pain or redness in the arm. This should go away quickly, and the HPV vaccine has not been associated with any long-term side effects. Since 2006, about over 100 million doses of the HPV vaccine have been distributed in the U.S. and over 280 million worldwide. In the years of HPV vaccine safety studies and monitoring, no serious safety concerns have been identified.”

(Sources include Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting Systems (VAERS); Arnheim-Dahlström, BMJ, Oct 2013; Klein NP, Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, Oct 2012; Scheller, JAMA, 2015; Sankaranarayanan, NIH, 2016; CDC, 2017).

“Possible Effects on Fertility”

“There is no data to suggest that getting the HPV vaccine will have an effect on future fertility. However, persistent HPV infection can cause cervical cancer and the treatment of cervical cancer can leave women unable to have children. Even treatment for cervical per-cancer can put a woman at risk for problems with her cervix during pregnancy causing preterm delivery or problems.”

Reminder/Recall Discussion

Many parents do not know that the full vaccine series requires multiple shots. Your reminder will help them complete the series.

“I want to let you know that the HPV vaccine has multiple shots in the series and the completion of the series is the best possible protection from cancer caused by HPV. Be sure to make a follow up appointment when you take your child to receive their first dose of the HPV vaccine. A great way to remember is to put your vaccine schedule on your calendar.”