As parents, you do everything you can to protect your children’s health for now and for the future. Today, there is a strong weapon to prevent several types of cancer in our kids: the HPV vaccine.

**HPV and cancer**

HPV is short for human papillomavirus, a common virus. In the United States each year, there are about 17,000 women and 9,000 men affected by HPV-related cancers. Many of these cancers could be prevented with vaccination. In both women and men, HPV can cause anal cancer and mouth/throat (oropharyngeal) cancer. It can also cause cancers of the cervix, vulva, and vagina in women; and cancer of the penis in men.

For women, screening is available to detect most cases of cervical cancer with a Pap smear. Unfortunately, there is no routine screening for other HPV-related cancers for women or men, and these cancers can cause pain, suffering, or even death. That is why a vaccine that prevents most of these types of cancers is so important.

**More about HPV**

HPV is a virus passed from one person to another during skin-to-skin sexual contact, including vaginal, oral, and anal sex. HPV is most common in people in their late teens and early 20s. Almost all sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives, though most will never even know it.

Most of the time, the body naturally fights off HPV, before HPV causes any health problems. But in some cases, the body does not fight off HPV, and HPV can cause health problems, like cancer and genital warts. Genital warts are not a life-threatening disease, but they can cause emotional stress, and their treatment can be very uncomfortable. About 1 in 100 sexually active adults in the United States has genital warts at any given time.

**HPV vaccination is recommended for pre-teen girls and boys at age 11 or 12 years**

HPV vaccine is also recommended for girls aged 13 through 26 years and for boys aged 13 through 21 years who have not yet been vaccinated. So if your son or daughter hasn’t started or finished the HPV vaccine series—it’s not too late! Talk to his or her healthcare provider (HCP) about getting the series for your child now.

Two vaccines—Cervarix and Gardasil—are available to prevent the HPV types that cause most cervical cancers and anal cancers. One of the HPV vaccines, Gardasil, also prevents vulvar and vaginal cancers in women and genital warts in both women and men. Only Gardasil has been tested and licensed for use in males. Both vaccines are given in a series of 3 shots over 6 months. The best way to remember to get your child all three shots is to make an appointment for the second and third shot before you leave the HCP’s office after the first shot.

**Is the HPV vaccine safe?**

Yes. Both HPV vaccines were studied in tens of thousands of people around the
More than 57 million doses have been distributed to date, and there have been no serious safety concerns. Vaccine safety continues to be monitored by the CDC and the FDA.

The most common side effects reported are mild. They include pain where the shot was given (usually the arm), fever, dizziness, and nausea.

You may have heard that some kids faint when they get vaccinated. Fainting is common with preteens and teens for many health-related procedures, not just the HPV shot. Be sure that your child eats something before going to get the vaccine. It’s a good idea to have your child sit or lie down while getting any vaccine, and for 15 minutes afterwards, to prevent fainting and any injuries that could happen from fainting.

The HPV vaccine can safely be given at the same time as the other recommended vaccines, including the Tdap, meningococcal, and influenza vaccines. Learn more about all of the recommended pre-teen vaccines at www.cdc.gov/vaccines/teens.

Help paying for vaccines
The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program provides vaccines for children aged 18 years or younger who are under-insured, not insured, Medicaid-eligible, or American Indian/Alaska Native. Learn more about the VFC program at www.cdc.gov/Features/VFCprogram/.

Whether you have insurance, or your child is VFC-eligible, some HCPs’ offices may also charge a fee to give the vaccines.

For more information about the vaccines recommended for pre-teens and teens:
800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)
http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/teens

*Readers are invited to photocopy Patient education pages in the journal and distribute them to their patients.