

Preventing cervical cancer – vaccinations and screenings work

Dr. Ana M. Rodriguez - January 2016



January is Cervical Health Awareness Month – a time to focus public attention on the need for women across the country to get screened for cervical cancer and for boys and girls to get vaccinated against the human papillomavirus

when they are eligible.

All women are at risk for cervical cancer. It occurs most often in women over age 30 with approximately 12,000 women in the United States diagnosed annually. Of these women about 4,000 will die, often women who never received the HPV vaccination or did not receive regular screenings for the illness.

Texas has one of the highest rates of HPV-related cervical cancer. Hispanic women have the highest rate of cervical cancer of any ethnic group with rates about 60 percent higher than those of non-Hispanic whites. Women living in the Rio Grande Valley have a 30 percent higher incidence and mortality rate from cervical cancer than those living in other parts of the state or country.

Fortunately, cervical cancer is one of the most easily preventable cancers. Pap and HPV testing, coupled with appropriate treatment for abnormal or precancerous cells, can prevent cervical cancer before it develops.

HPV vaccination can prevent the disease as well. According to the National Cancer Institute, widespread adoption of a three-dose HPV

vaccination for all boys and girls ages 11 to 12 has the potential to reduce cervical cancer deaths around the world by as much as two-thirds. Unfortunately, widespread adoption of HPV vaccination has not occurred in Texas or the United States. The 2012 National Immunization Survey reports, only 30 percent of Texas females aged 13 to 17 received all three doses of HPV vaccine. Nationally, the rate is only slightly higher at 33 percent. The goal of the Center for Disease Control is 80 percent adherence by 2020.

As an investigator with the Comparative Effectiveness Research on Cancer in Texas project, I am part of an interdisciplinary group of researchers examining important questions about cancer screening and the quality of treatment, follow up and ongoing supportive care for cancer patients and survivors in Texas.

I am currently working with colleagues at The University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston and MD Anderson Cancer Center on proposals to develop HPV vaccination programs serving predominantly high-risk populations in Texas. Other countries that have implemented strong HPV vaccination programs have at least 70 percent of children vaccinated.

Let's work together to prevent cervical cancer. Make sure your children receive the three-dose HPV vaccine at the appropriate age. Schedule regular cervical cancer screening if you are a woman over age 21.

Vaccinations and screenings do work! ●

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