



# COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Marissa J. Levine, MD, MPH, FAAFP  
State Health Commissioner

*Department of Health*  
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RICHMOND, VA 23218

TTY 7-1-1 OR  
1-800-828-1120

Dear Parents of Rising Sixth Grade Students:

The 2007 Virginia General Assembly passed a law that requires the Virginia Department of Health to provide the parents of rising sixth grade girls with information on Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and the Human Papillomavirus Vaccine, to ensure that parents are well informed of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommendation that girls 11-12 years old receive the vaccine. In 2011, the CDC made an additional recommendation that boys of the same age also routinely receive HPV vaccine.

Some strains of HPV cause cervical cancer in women. HPV is also associated with several less common cancers in both men and women. The HPV vaccine is the first vaccine developed to prevent most cervical cancers. The vaccine targets the strains of HPV that most commonly cause cervical cancer and is highly effective in preventing infection with these types of HPV in young people who have not been exposed to them before getting the vaccine.

After reviewing the information provided on the reverse side of this letter, please contact your health care provider to determine if your child should receive the vaccine series. HPV vaccine is available from your doctor, military clinics, or the local health department. If you choose to have your child vaccinated, you may provide documentation to your child's school; and they will update your child's school immunization record.

Should you have additional questions, please contact Sandra Sommer, PhD, Division of Immunization, Virginia Department of Health, by telephone at 804-864-8055, or by email at [sandra.sommer@vdh.virginia.gov](mailto:sandra.sommer@vdh.virginia.gov) or Tia Campbell, Office of Student Services, Virginia Department of Education, by telephone at 804-786-8671, or by email at [tia.campbell@doe.virginia.gov](mailto:tia.campbell@doe.virginia.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Marissa J. Levine".

Marissa J. Levine, MD, MPH, FAAFP  
State Health Commissioner

## **Facts for Parents about HPV and the HPV Vaccine\***

### **What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?**

HPV is a common virus that is spread through sexual contact. Most of the time, HPV has no symptoms so people do not know they have it. There are many different types of HPV. In most people, HPV goes away on its own within two years and does not cause health problems. Sometimes, HPV infections will persist and can cause health problems. Experts do not know why HPV goes away in some cases, but not in others.

### **How common is HPV?**

HPV is very common. About 79 million people in the U.S. are currently infected with HPV and about 14 million more, including teens, get newly infected each year.

### **Does HPV cause cancer?**

HPV can cause cervical cancer in women and several other types of cancers in both men and women. Other types of HPV can cause genital warts in both males and females.

### **How common are cancers caused by HPV?**

Cervical cancer is the 2<sup>nd</sup> leading cause of cancer deaths among women around the world. In the U.S., about 12,000 women get cervical cancer every year and about 4,000 are expected to die from it. HPV can also cause other cancers in both men and women.

### **What is the HPV vaccine?**

The HPV vaccine is the first vaccine developed to prevent most cervical cancers and genital warts. It works by protecting against the types of HPV that most commonly cause these conditions.

There are two brands of vaccine that can be given to prevent HPV. Talk with your healthcare provider about which vaccine is best for your child.

For more information, ask your child's healthcare provider or call 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)

Website:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/who/teens/index.html>

### **Who should get the HPV vaccine?**

Doctors recommend this three-dose series of vaccine for all 11-12 year old girls and boys. The vaccine offers the best protection to preteens who receive all three doses and have time to develop an immune response before ever being exposed to the virus. Also, HPV vaccine produces a higher immune response in preteens than older adolescents.

### **Is the HPV vaccine effective?**

The HPV vaccine works extremely well. The amount of HPV infections in teen girls decreased by 56% in the four years after the vaccine was recommended in 2006. Research has also shown that fewer teens are getting genital warts since the vaccine has been in use. In other countries, research shows that HPV vaccine has already decreased the amount of pre-cancer in women. The vaccine works for at least 10 years, and probably longer, without becoming less effective.

### **Is the HPV vaccine safe?**

The HPV vaccines have been used in the U.S. and around the world for several years and have been very safe. Several mild to moderate problems are known to occur. They include pain, redness, or swelling in the arm where the shot is given, and sometimes fever, nausea or headache. Serious side effects are rare.

Brief fainting spells and related symptoms (such as jerking movements) can happen after any medical procedure, including vaccination. Sitting or lying down for about 15 minutes after a vaccination can help prevent fainting and injuries caused by falls.

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\*Adapted from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): "HPV Vaccine for Preteens and Teens" (June 2014), "HPV Vaccine – Questions & Answers" (Aug 2014), "What Parents Should Know About HPV Vaccine Safety and Effectiveness" (June 2014) AND HPV Vaccine Information Statements (5/17/2013)