



## Illinois Chapter

### **HPV Vaccine Frequently Asked Questions for Patients and their Families**

#### **What is the HPV Vaccine?**

Gardasil®, the Human Papillomavirus—or HPV—vaccine, is the first vaccine developed to prevent the four most common types of HPV that cause cervical cancer and genital warts. Because two of these types of HPV cause 70% of all cervical cancer, the vaccine significantly decreases a girl's chance of one day developing cervical cancer.

#### **How is the HPV Vaccine administered?**

The HPV vaccine, called Gardasil®, is administered through a sequence of three injections given over a six-month (minimum) period of time.

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

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends HPV vaccination for girls age 11 and 12 years old. The vaccine also can be given to girls and women ages 13 through 26 who did not get the vaccine when they were younger or who did not complete the vaccination series.

Optimally, HPV vaccine should be administered before the onset of sexual activity. However, girls and women who are sexually active can still benefit from receiving the vaccine. The vaccine prevents disease in girls/women who have not previously acquired one or more types of HPV prevented by the vaccine. It does not treat cervical cancer or genital warts for those who were exposed to the virus before getting the vaccine.

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

HPV is a common virus that currently infects about 20 million people. Infection usually occurs in people in their teens and early 20s. In fact, women have an 80% chance of developing HPV by the time they are 50 years old.

#### **Is the HPV Vaccine safe?**

Yes. Gardasil® was tested in more than 11,000 females ages 9 to 26 in countries around the world, including the United States. These studies found that the HPV vaccine was safe and caused no serious side effects. The main side effect was mild pain at the injection site.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) closely monitor the safety of all vaccines. While there has been some recent media coverage about girls



## Illinois Chapter

becoming ill or dying within months or years following their vaccination, there have only been 20 cases out of more than 16 million doses distributed worldwide. After careful investigation, no link to the vaccine has been identified indicating that the illness or deaths were related in any way to the vaccine.

### **Are there other ways, besides the vaccine, to prevent HPV?**

The surest way to prevent genital HPV is to avoid sexual contact. For persons who are sexually active, condoms may lower their chances of getting HPV, if used all the time and the right way. Condoms may lower a person's chances of developing genital warts and cervical cancer. But HPV can infect areas that are not covered by a condom – so condoms may not fully protect against HPV.

### **Will girls/women be protected against HPV and related diseases, even if they don't get all three doses of the vaccine?**

The HPV vaccine is recommended as a three-dose vaccine. It is not yet known how much protection girls/women would get if they receive only one or two doses of the vaccine. For this reason, it is very important that girls/women get all three doses of the vaccine.

### **Will the girls/women who have been vaccinated still need a Pap test?**

Yes, they will still need to see their healthcare provider for a Pap test. Regular Pap tests are recommended for all women starting within three years of when a girl/woman begins sexual activity or at age 21, whichever comes first. The vaccine will NOT provide protection against all types of HPV that cause cervical cancer, so women will still be at risk for developing some cancers caused by HPV.