West Virginia Immunization Network

For Immediate Release
July 24, 2014
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West Virginia Health Associations Issue Call to Action for Cancer Prevention

Charleston, WV- Thirteen West Virginia health organizations and associations today called on health care providers around the state to increase use of a vaccine that is known to prevent certain cancers caused by the human papillomavirus, also known as HPV.

Representatives from the various organizations announced the call-to-action during the Mountains of Hope Cancer Coalition meeting in Charleston. The announcement was made in tandem with a report released today by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on teen immunization coverage in the United States.

The CDC's National Immunization Survey (NIS) provides data on vaccination coverage which is used to identify groups at risk of vaccine-preventable diseases and to evaluate the effectiveness of programs designed to increase coverage. The NIS-Teen survey shows that in 2013 the percentage of teenage girls receiving the three-dose series of HPV vaccine has leveled off at 37.6% nationally and slightly higher in West Virginia at 38.4%. To prevent infection, the HPV vaccine is recommended at age 11 or 12, before the child has contact with HPV viruses. NIS data show that only 49 percent of girls in West Virginia have begun the three-shot HPV vaccine series and only 38 percent completed it. Only 29 percent of teen boys in West Virginia have begun the vaccination series.

HPV is a very common virus. Approximately 79 million Americans are currently infected with HPV, with about half of these infections occurring among teens and young adults. HPV is so common that most sexually active adults become infected at some point in their lives. HPV infection can lead to cancer of the cervix, vagina, vulva, anus, penis, head and neck and can also cause genital warts.

The National Cancer Institute lists West Virginia as having the highest rate of cervical cancer in the nation and the fourth highest annual death rate from cervical cancer. "Unfortunately, efforts to vaccinate children against the HPV virus have stalled," Crystal Sheaves, co-chair of the WV Immunization Network said. CDC research shows that for every year the U.S. delays reaching 80 percent vaccination rate for the HPV vaccine, another 4,400 women will develop cervical cancer. "This is very frustrating. We have a vaccine that prevents cancers and yet 2 out of 3 kids in WV are entering adolescence and adulthood susceptible to HPV and the cancers it causes."

The organizations call on healthcare providers around the state to strengthen their recommendation to their patients for the HPV vaccination. They point out quick early action – a simple vaccination – **can** make a difference and save lives.

The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends the HPV vaccine for females ages 11-26 and males 11-21. Children under 19 years of age who are uninsured, underinsured, or eligible for Medicaid qualify for free vaccinations through the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program (the provider may charge a fee for the office visit). Contact your child's physician or the local health department for more information on this program.

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