Cancer-preventing HPV vaccine availability expands this month

by Bend Weekly News Sources

Starting December 1, the new human papillomavirus vaccine will be added to the list of immunizations covered in Oregon under the federal Vaccines for Children program.

The cancer-preventing immunization, more commonly referred to as HPV vaccine, has been on the market since June at a cost of $120 per dose. Three doses are required for full protection. Currently some private insurance plans cover the vaccine but not all do, according to Lorraine Duncan, immunization manager in the Oregon Department of Human Services Public Health Division.

"HPV vaccine is a powerful tool in the fight against cervical cancer," Duncan said. "We are very pleased that the federal government has added it to the list of vaccines they will provide under the VFC program. This means that life-saving protection is available to these young women in Oregon."

Last spring, the national Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, a panel of immunization experts that advises the federal government on vaccine policy, approved the vaccine for girls and women from age nine through 26 years, with a specific recommendation that all girls ages 11 to 12 be routinely given the three-dose series of HPV vaccine to provide maximum protection.

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted virus in the country. The HPV vaccine is remarkably effective against the two strains that cause 70 percent of all cervical cancer in women.

Cervical cancer used to be a common cause of cancer death for women in the United States, but the widespread use of Pap tests has dramatically reduced the frequency and rate of death from cervical cancer. Even so, each year more than 100 Oregon women develop invasive cervical cancer and 40 die of the disease, according to Duncan.

The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program is administered by the DHS Public Health Division. It supplies federally-purchased vaccines at no cost to public and private health care providers. Patients through age 18 are eligible if they are uninsured, enrolled in Medicaid, or are an American Indian or Alaskan Native.

The VFC program is one of many public health programs that focus on prevention and helping people manage their health so they can be as productive and healthy as possible. Additional information about the program is on the DHS Immunization Web site.

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