

An Ounce of Prevention for Life;

WNY victim is advocate for new HPV vaccine

By MAKI BECKER
The Buffalo News

Karlene Hafemann had HPV. The scary kind -- one of the strains of the human papilloma virus that can cause cervical cancer.

The University at Buffalo student underwent surgery in August to excise the potentially cancerous cells from her body.

"I guess when you're 21, you think that cancer is never a possibility," Hafemann said. "But there it was."

Luckily, the abnormal cells on Hafemann's cervix were removed before they could develop into cancer, and the virus has been cleared from her system.

"It was scary," she recalled. "I wasn't sure if I had cancer. The medical bills are so expensive. The doctors said, 'We're not sure how far along it is.' It was one of the worst times of my life."

To prevent more girls and young women from joining the 7.5 million now believed to be infected with the HPV virus, Hafemann and health advocates in Western New York are urging parents of girls to get their daughters vaccinated.

"This is cancer we're talking about -- cancer. You know what I mean?" said Hafemann, who is a Planned Parenthood intern. "If people don't want to see their children die, their mothers

die, there shouldn't be an option. They should be talking to their doctors about getting the shots."

A new study on the prevalence of HPV published Wednesday in the Journal of the American Medical Association revealed that more than a third of women in the United States have been infected by HPV by the time they were 24.

That figure is no surprise to officials at Planned Parenthood of Western New York. "We see a lot of young, sexually active women at our clinics, and [HPV] is what we see. Absolutely," said Melissa Mitrovich, a family nurse practitioner at Planned Parenthood of Western New York's mobile outreach program.

Many of Planned Parenthood's 10,000 clients in Erie and Niagara counties are young women in their late teens and early 20s who attend the area's universities and colleges.

Since the fall, Planned Parenthood's two pediatric care programs have been offering the vaccine to parents for their daughters.

"We've not had one negative response," said Colleen Schiffhauer, director of medical services. "Every single patient has gotten a vaccine who was in the age group [9 and older]. Not one of the parents of the patients has

cause symptoms. Researchers don't know exactly why Chlamydia infection increases cervical cancer risk, but they think it might be because active immune system cells at the site of a chlamydia infection might damage normal cells and cause them to turn cancerous.

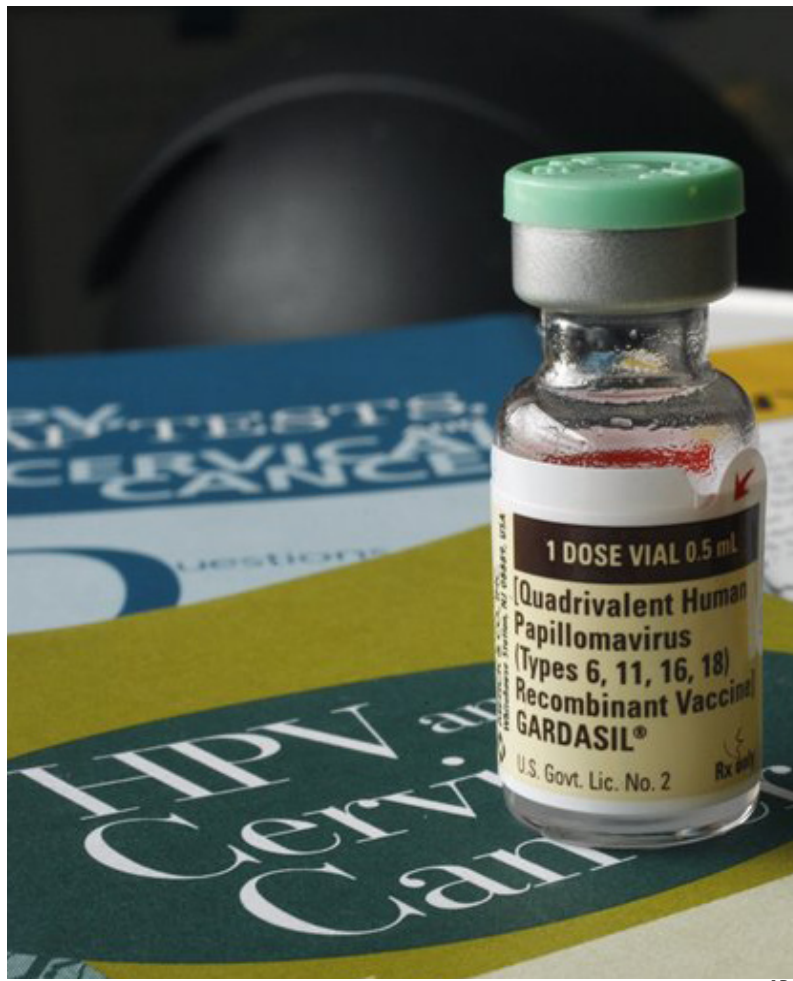
4 A diet low in fruits and vegetables. Women who don't eat many fruits and vegetables miss out on the protective antioxidants and phytochemicals such as vitamins A, C, E and beta-carotene, which have all been shown to help prevent cervical cancer and other forms of cancer.

5 A family history of cervical cancer--your mother or sister had cervical cancer--may mean you have a genetic tendency for the disease. This could be because such women are genetically less able to fight off HPV infection than other women.

6 Long-term oral contraceptive (OC) use (five or more years) may very slightly increase a woman's risk of cancer of the cervix, according to some statistical evidence. The American Cancer Society advises women to discuss the benefits of OC use versus this very slight potential risk with their health care professionals.

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- Karlene Hafemann



KARLENE HAFEMANN, VICTIM OF HPV, RECOMMENDS GARDASIL, A VACCINE DESIGNED TO PREVENT THE INITIAL ESTABLISHMENT OF HPV.

refused to vaccinate their child." Schiffhauer estimated that the clinic had vaccinated "a couple of hundred" girls so far.

Other clinics and private medical practices in the area also have begun offering the vaccine.

And in mid-March, Planned Parenthood plans to make the vaccine available at all its clinics so that young women, along with girls, will have access to it.

The vaccine, with the brand name Gardasil, was developed by the pharmaceutical giant Merck and is targeted at girls

and women between ages 9 and 26. More versions of the vaccine are expected to be available soon.

Following Federal Drug Administration approval of Gardasil in June, Merck has aggressively marketed the vaccine with its "One Less" campaign, featuring teenage girls determined to be "one less" stricken with cervical cancer. The company has also lobbied states to make the vaccine a school requirement.

Earlier this week, Assemblywoman Amy Paulin, D-Scarsdale, introduced legislation to do just that for girls in New

Furor on Rush to Require Cervical Cancer Vaccine

By STEPHANIE SAUL AND ANDREW POLLACK

The New York Times

Racing to embrace a new vaccine, at least 20 states are considering mandatory inoculation of young girls against the sexually transmitted virus that causes cervical cancer.

But a roaring backlash has some health experts worried that the proponents, including the vaccine's maker, Merck, have pushed too far too fast, potentially undermining eventual prospects for the broadest possible immunization.

Groups wary of drug industry motives find themselves on the same side of the anti-vaccination debate with unexpected political allies: religious and cultural conservatives who oppose mandatory use of the vaccine because they say it would encourage sexual activity by young girls.

Even some who support use of the vaccine question the rush and the vaccine's high cost -- about \$400 for the three-shot course. "The decision to make this mandatory this early has created a significant controversy over things that have nothing to do with the vaccine," said Doctor Joseph A. Bocchini, chairman of the

committee on infectious diseases of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

Like most other public health experts, Bocchini advocates the vaccine's use. But many say the rush toward mandatory inoculation could prove counterproductive.

Most of the proposals call for vaccinating girls before they enter the 6th grade, a group that would include about two million girls nationwide annually if all states imposed the requirement.

In Texas, Governor Rick Perry recently issued an order that girls be vaccinated. But some legislators are trying to overturn the order, with some opponents complaining because the governor's former chief of staff is now a lobbyist for Merck. State lawmakers are scheduled to hold a hearing Monday on a bill to rescind that order.

And in Illinois, a bill introduced by a legislator who had the virus the vaccine is intended to prevent prompted a conservative group's blog to speculate that she had been promiscuous.

"I'm offended by their ig-

Pap Test May be Fading

Genetic tests slow frequency

BY ANDREW POLLACK
The New York Times

The big news in the war on cervical cancer is the new vaccine recently approved to prevent the disease. But another major change that will affect millions of women is also under way, though more slowly and quietly.

The Pap smear, an annual ritual for many women and the mainstay of cervical cancer prevention for more than half a century, may start to fade in importance.

It will not disappear for many more years, if ever. But a newer genetic test that detects human papillomavirus, or HPV, which causes cervical cancer, is starting to play a bigger role in screening. And other genetic tests are being developed. At the least, some experts say, women will no longer need Pap smears as often.

"We can potentially change the entire cervical screening paradigm," said Doctor Thomas C. Wright, a professor of pathology at Columbia University Medical Center who is also a consultant for Roche, which is developing a genetic HPV test.

The new vaccine could also deal a longer-term blow to Pap testing, which works by detecting abnormal cells from the cervix that could be on their way to becoming cancerous. It is not that women would no longer need screening because they had been vaccinated. The vaccine, approved only for girls and women 9 to 26 years old, does not protect against all strains of HPV that cause cancer.

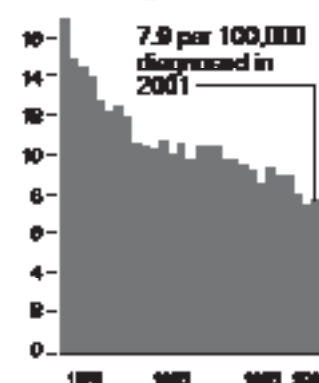
If a precancerous lesion is present, the Pap test will detect it only 50 percent to 80 percent of the time. Pap testing is effective only because it is done often; a lesion can take 10 years to turn into a cancer, so a yearly test will probably find it in time.

As more women get the HPV vaccine, however, the number of lesions will decline, making the Pap test more costly per cancer case detected. And with fewer problems to detect, said Doctor Eduardo L. Franco, a professor of epidemiology and oncology at

Cervical cancer

Test results of a vaccine to prevent cervical cancer are showing promise. While the disease continues to decline, it kills an estimated 5,000 women annually in the United States.

Cases per 100,000 people



SOURCES: SEER Cancer Statistics Review, American Cancer Society AP