



## CONDOMS DON'T PROTECT AFTER ALL

*Now vaccination is the answer*

In an ironic twist some state legislators in the House are calling for **mandatory** vaccination for the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) for every Kansas girl entering the sixth grade. In a cursory look over the co-sponsors of **HB 2227**, many of these people are the same ones that have assured us through the years that condoms protect against sexually-transmitted diseases. CWA has said for years that condoms do not protect from all disease, but now that an HPV vaccine is available, the other side has to tell the truth. HPV infection is a serious problem in our sex-saturated society. It is easily transmitted not only because condoms do not completely protect against it, but because it can be transmitted skin to skin as well as in sexual intercourse. Annually, two and a half million American women experience an abnormal Pap smear; a majority of those have an HPV infection. HPV is the primary cause of cervical cancer (99 percent). Cervical cancer is diagnosed in 13,000 women a year with almost 5,000 deaths annually. HPV is associated with several other cancers as well: oral, vaginal, vulva, penile and anal cancer. According to the CDC Web site, by age 50 up to 80 percent of sexually active women will experience an HPV infection. Of those, one in three can develop cervical cancer.

### Gardasil

Recently, a vaccine against the strains of HPV that cause cervical cancer was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). This vaccine, Gardasil, manufactured by Merck, is available in a three-shot regimen over a period of six months. Each shot costs \$120 not counting doctor's office visits. The vaccine has shown to be effective against HPV types 16 and 18 which are responsible for 70 percent of all cervical cancers and HPV types 6 and 11 which are responsible for 90 percent of genital warts (another manifestation of HPV infection). There is no evidence that it reduces the risk for cervical cancers caused by other HPV types which cause the remaining 30 percent of cervical cancers [Statement from the Medical Institute for Sexual Health on HPV Vaccine]. There are more than 100 types of HPV; the vaccine is effective against four of them, albeit they are the ones which cause most of the problems. According to its manufacturer the vaccine will not protect against HPV types to which patients have already been exposed, and it will not protect against other diseases that are not caused by HPV.

### Adverse Reactions

During clinical trials, one of which was conducted at Kansas University in 1999, some adverse problems were reported; the most common were: pain; swelling; itching and redness of the injection site; fever; nausea and dizziness. Difficulty in breathing was reported rarely.

### Protecting pre-pubescent girls

Since the vaccine is most effective *before* a girl becomes sexually active, many are recommending that girls be

vaccinated at nine to 12 years of age. There have been no long-term studies on the effects of the vaccine. No one knows for sure how long the antibody titer necessary to produce an immune response will last. Some have suggested that a booster shot will be necessary in five years. If a girl is vaccinated at age nine, her maximum immunity would be declining by age 14 the age at which many girls become sexually active. The vaccine has been approved only for nine months; yet seven states have already mandated its use, despite unanswered questions.

### Some questions and things to think about

A vaccine against the HPV types that cause most of the cervical cancer in the nation is good news. However, mandating that vaccine may be problematic for the following reasons:

- Cost: The vaccine alone costs \$360 minimum for a full regimen *without* doctor's office calls. A family with three girls entering their teen years would be faced with a minimum of \$1200 to \$1500. Many families cannot afford this cost, thus forcing state agencies to under-write the cost for the indigent and underserved population. Many insurance policies do not cover vaccinations, especially expensive vaccines.
- It does not prevent all cervical cancer. Girls and women will still be required to get a regular Pap smear to detect cervical cancers caused by other HPV types. Having had the vaccine might give women a false sense of security.
- Some have said it gives a message to our youth that we expect them to be promiscuous.
- Mandating the vaccine at age 9-12 is protecting a child that is already protected by statutory rape laws. It is against the law to have sexual relations with a child under 14 in Kansas.
- Parents, not the state, should make medical decisions for their child.
- Because of the newness of the vaccine and the unclear status of long-term effects and efficacy, should our children have to be the state's guinea pigs? Many worry that there are no statistics on carcinogenicity, or genotoxicity or chromosomal damage. Since this vaccine will be given to mostly pre-pubescent girls, shouldn't we have the facts on that?
- Should our healthy children be vaccinated for the benefit of irresponsible people?
- Ads promoting the vaccine make it sound like you are worry-free in the cervical cancer department, and that is far from the truth. Will the state be sending the wrong message?
- This vaccine has been heavily marketed. Mandating its use is handing its manufacturer an instant profit.

### Our thoughts:

We applaud any medical advance that saves lives, prevents misery and enhances a healthy body. However, in light of the questions mentioned above, we do not agree with making this vaccine mandatory for all girls entering sixth grade. We believe in patient education. We would rather see the state spend its time educating people about all the risks and benefits of this vaccine so they can make an informed choice. Patient's rights always include a right to refuse; our children deserve that, too.