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Vaccination Data on Common STD Shows Many Valley Women May be At Risk
HARC Research Point to Vulnerability to HPV in at Least Two Age Groups

(PALM DESERT, CA) – Vaccinations do not exist for most sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). However, in the case of at least one particular infection, human papilloma virus (HPV), girls and women can protect themselves by undergoing a brief series of shots. Unfortunately, in eastern Riverside County, a majority of females in at least two important demographic groups are opting not to take such precautions.

Data gathered by the Palm Desert-based Health Assessment Resource Center (HARC) shows that just 19.1% of women aged 18-33 received the FDA-approved drug Gardasil®. Of the minority that opted for inoculation, less than one-third took only one shot, 10% received two and 61.3% completed the physician-recommended three-dose sequence.

In girls between the ages of 9-17, the percentage vaccinated in some form climbs to 25.8%, but still leaves three of every four vulnerable. Of those receiving shots, 13.8% received a single dose, 27.7% underwent two and 58.5% opted for all three treatments.

There are numerous forms of human papilloma viruses, some of which are not sexually transmitted. HPV now infects 20 million Americans, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – and another 6 million people become newly infected each year.

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HPV remains difficult to detect, because most people with the infection do not develop symptoms or health problems. In 90% of cases, the body's immune system clears HPV naturally within two years. However, the risks associated with carrying the virus are significant.

In fact, persistent HPV infections are now recognized by the CDC as the cause of essentially all cervical cancers. It was estimated that in 2010, about 12,000 women in the United States would be diagnosed with this type of cancer and more than 4,000 would die from it.

The unknown nature of the STD is one reason why Gardasil is prescribed as a three-shot regimen. The CDC recommends that the second dose be given one to two months after the first, and the third rendered six months after the initial shot. To date, no studies have shown whether one or two doses protects as well as the three-shot sequence.

“Conversation about a disease like HPV can be uncomfortable, and that's why many people avoid it,” said HARC Board President Glen Grayman M.D. “Hopefully, our research puts a spotlight on this dangerous, yet preventable health threat and influence people to talk to their doctor about vaccination options for themselves and their daughters.”

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About HARC

Formed in 2006 by a consortium of more than 35 public and private healthcare agencies, the Health Assessment Resource Center (HARC) conducts a confidential community health status assessment in eastern Riverside County every 3 years to identify major health and quality of life issues. The nonprofit 501 (c) (3) organization is funded in part by contributions from community partners, as well as entities that contract with the agency for customized public health research. More information can be obtained by calling HARC at (760) 404-1945, or visiting the organization's website at www.harcddata.org.