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# It's Essential to Get Vaccinated for HPV, Even During a Pandemic

October 1 2020 – One of the many unintended consequences of the pandemic is that the public has not made preventative healthcare a priority, creating a perfect storm for potential health and medical issues in the future.

This is also true with the human papillomavirus (HPV), which can be contracted and spread by both men and women.

HPV is a common virus with more than 100 varieties. HPV can resolve on its own, but it can cause genital warts and certain

types of cancer in both males and females later in life.

The most common HPV-related cancer in women is cervical, and because of its prevalence, the American Cancer Society recently recommended replacing pap tests with HPV testing for cervical cancer. Oropharyngeal (mouth and throat) and penile cancers in men and anal cancer in both women and men are also often caused by HPV, which can also lead to cancer in the back of the throat, including the base of the tongue and tonsils. All these cancers are caused by HPV infections that did resolve and can take years to manifest after a person has contracted the virus.

There is no cure for HPV, which is why Broward Health medical professionals stress the importance of the HPV vaccine. It is the most effective way to protect against the virus.

✖ “It is estimated that 80 percent of men and women who are sexually active will be infected with HPV at some point in their lives,” said Brian M. Slomovitz M.D., a board-certified physician in obstetrics and gynecology and gynecologic oncology with the Broward Health Physician Group. “Most people are asymptomatic carriers and are unaware they have contracted the virus, unintentionally infecting their partners and causing the virus to thrive.”

The numbers are staggering. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 79 million Americans are infected with HPV with about 14 million becoming infected each year. Almost 36,000 cancer diagnoses each year will be attributable to HPV.

HPV is similar to COVID-19 in that both are easily transmittable. However, HPV is spread through direct contact, most commonly during sexual activity, whether anal, vaginal, or oral sex. It is highly contagious and, unlike COVID-19, there is a proven and widely accessible vaccine.

According to the CDC, vaccination is recommended for all pre-teens (boys and girls) ages 11-12, as well as teens and young adults up to age 26 who didn't finish their vaccination

series. Some adults up to age 45 not already vaccinated may also choose to discuss HPV risks with their physician and possible immunization.

✖ “We continue to treat many men who are suffering from a variety of throat, lip, and neck cancers due to contracting the HPV virus earlier on in their lives,” said Ryan Sobel, M.D., head and neck oncologic surgeon at Broward Health. “The best offense is a good defense. It’s unfortunate as these life-threatening cancers could have been easily prevented with a vaccination.”

If you do not have a primary physician and need an HPV immunization, you can find a doctor at [BrowardHealth.org/Find-Doctor](http://BrowardHealth.org/Find-Doctor).

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