Gender Issues

How do parents feel about HPV vaccinations for boys?

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Last summer health care experts questioned whether more boys and young men should be encouraged to get vaccinated for human papillomavirus (HPV). The three-dose vaccine is already recommended for girls; however, at about $130 per shot, it's not exactly cheap.

One study concluded that the associated costs outweighed the benefits for boys, but it also said that both genders needed more education about HPV. "The public perception is that this is a vaccine to prevent cervical cancer [in girls] rather than a vaccine that prevents a number of cancers including oropharyngeal [throat cancers], which are quite important in boys and young men," says Paul A. Offit, MD, a doctor at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

This year, Boston University School of Medicine (BUSM) researchers conducted a small study on the issue. Scientists informed 120 parents and legal guardians of 11- to 17-year-old boys about HPV vaccination benefits. Researchers found that poor and minority parents favored HPV vaccination of boys. (Young men in this population group are more likely to suffer from HPV-related penile, anal and oral cancers.)

What's more, findings showed that these parents were also more likely than their white counterparts to support school-entry rules that required kids be vaccinated for HPV.

Rebecca Perkins, MD, an assistant ob-gyn professor at BUSM, and the study's lead author, says these findings show that most parents would accept HPV vaccination for their sons just as readily as for their daughters.

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