ASCO Urges Aggressive Efforts to Increase HPV Vaccination and Prevent Cancer

Society calls on member oncologists to help lead push for all adolescents and young adults to be vaccinated against cervical and other cancers

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ALEXANDRIA, Va. – Use of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccines should be rapidly expanded to protect thousands of young people in the United States – and millions worldwide – from life-threatening cancers, the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) said today in a policy statement. Published in the Journal of Clinical Oncology, the statement outlines current barriers to HPV vaccination and recommendations to promote the uptake of these vaccines, which have the potential to save millions of lives.

HPV is usually passed from person to person during direct skin-to-skin contact and is the most common sexually transmitted disease in the United States. There are more than 150 different types of HPV, many of which can cause cancer. The most prevalent is cervical cancer, which HPV infection is the cause of in almost every case. HPV can also cause oral cancer and is associated with anal cancer, vulvar and vaginal cancers in women and penile cancer in men.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration first approved HPV vaccines in 2006, and they have demonstrated excellent efficacy and safety in long-term studies and follow-up. This prompted the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to recommend in 2014 that all boys and girls between the ages of 11 and 12 years old be vaccinated. For adults, vaccines are recommended for males through age 21 and females through age 26. The CDC also recommends vaccination for gay and bisexual men through age 26, and for men and women with compromised immune systems through age 26 if they did not get fully vaccinated at a younger age.

“With safe and effective vaccines readily available, no young person today should have to face the devastating diagnosis of a preventable cancer like cervical cancer. But unless we rapidly increase vaccination rates for boys and girls, many of them will,” said ASCO President Julie M. Vose, MD, MBA, FASCO. “As oncologists, we see the terrible effects of these cancers first hand, and we have
to contribute to improving today’s alarmingly low vaccination rates.”

The 2011 National Immunization Survey found that only about 36% of girls and 14% of boys have received the full schedule of HPV vaccines needed to provide protection[i]. Also, in a study published today in theJournal of Global Oncology (JGO), researchers analyzed data from the North American Association of Central Cancer Registries and found that a 40-year decline in cervical cancer rates in the U.S. has slowed, a finding also supported by the newly released NCI SEER Cancer Statistics Review. The JGO study notes that some states with the highest incidence of cervical cancer have low rates of HPV vaccine uptake.

ASCO supports the recommendation to markedly increase the proportion of young boys and girls receiving the HPV vaccine in the United States and worldwide because research has shown that it is most effective in preventing cancer. The Society also makes recommendations in the following areas to increase the use of the vaccine.

- Education and awareness among healthcare professionals, policymakers, patients and the public, including ways to improve delivery in doctor’s offices with the use of electronic health record systems
- Coverage and access for routine vaccination, including consideration of school-based HPV vaccination programs, which have been successful in other countries
- Addressing critical knowledge gaps through research on effective ways of increasing routine vaccine use

ASCO also believes oncologists can play a vital role in increasing the uptake of HPV vaccines. While most oncologists will not be the direct healthcare providers of these preventive measures, they still play a very important role in the process through research and advocacy. ASCO encourages oncologists to advocate for and actively promote policy change to increase the use of the vaccination.

“Oncologists have a professional obligation to help reduce the burden of cancer on patients, their families and our communities,” said Howard H. Bailey, MD, immediate past chair of ASCO’s Cancer Prevention Committee and chair of the task force that developed the policy statement. “We need to use our interactions with our patients, primary care colleagues and healthcare systems to raise awareness of HPV-related cancers and critical role of vaccination in preventing them.”

In addition to the statement, ASCO will publish a guideline later this year on cervical cancer prevention in primary care that also addresses HPV vaccination.

The statement can be accessed at http://www.asco.org/practice-research/cancer-prevention and information on HPV and a blog post about the statement and an accompanying infographic can be found on ASCO’s patient information website, Cancer.Net.
Read the full policy statement and JGO study.


About ASCO:

Founded in 1964, the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) is the world’s leading professional organization representing physicians who care for people with cancer. With nearly 40,000 members, ASCO is committed to improving cancer care through scientific meetings, educational programs and peer-reviewed journals. ASCO is supported by its affiliate organization, the Conquer Cancer Foundation, which funds ground-breaking research and programs that make a tangible difference in the lives of people with cancer. For ASCO information and resources, visit www.asco.org. Patient-oriented cancer information is available at www.cancer.net.