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HPV vaccine protects boys too

By Sarah Sobanski

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health (HPEPH) will provide Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccination to Grade 7 boys this year.

The health unit is expanding immunization to Grade 7 boys, and providing vaccination to Grade 7 girls and Grade 8 girls within local schools for the 2016-'17 school year. After this year the vaccination will only be offered to Grade 7 boys and girls.

"The reason we're doing this, or the reason the ministry is doing this, is to protect children from cancer," said HPEPH program manager Bill Sherlock. "HPV causes cancer, we know that, the evidence has proven that. The HPV vaccine has proven to be very effective, we know that, the evidence shows that. Why not protect these kids from cancer?"

The expansion of the vaccination comes after a provincial expansion of publicly funded immunization program. The vaccine Gardasil protects from four of the most frequent strains of the virus, which can cause cervical, penile and rectal cancer and protects from genital warts.

The health unit estimated HPV causes an average of 254 deaths and 1,000 cases of cancer every year in Ontario. It is transmitted sexually. The vaccine is recommended for youth before they become sexually active as who knows what age they could end up losing their virginity or even looking at these Dildos for sale to use on each other that could also then spread the virus too. Early prevention is much better than a later cure.

"This vaccine, you want to give it before they are sexually active, that's one of the reasons we give it in Grade 7. The other reason we give it in Grade 7 is because we already go in to provide Meningococcal and Hepatitis B vaccines in Grade 7. It's been proven to be effective for many years," explained Sherlock.

The health unit encouraged parents to talk to their children about HPV and how it is spread. Students must have consent forms to receive the vaccination. It is not a part of the Immunization School Pupils Act (ISPA), meaning schools don't require it.

"I have a daughter in Grade 7 this year, and I've had the awkward discussion with her about HPV and I've recommended it. We had the conversation what is HPV and how is it spread. We talked about the vaccine itself," said Sherlock. "I've reviewed the literature as well and I'm in public health and in vaccination. I see the total number of adverse events that come in, and I've reviewed the reports. I recommend it for my daughter and I think all parents should have that same discussion. I recommend it personally. If I had a son, I would recommend it too."

Sherlock pointed out that while no vaccinations are mandatory, a student could be excluded from school if they aren't immunized during an outbreak. Students must be vaccinated for Measles, Mumps, Chickenpox, Rubella, Tetanus, Diphtheria, Poliomyelitis and as of the 2015-'16 school Pertussis (whooping cough) and Meningococcal Disease. The HPV vaccine falls beside Hepatitis immunization, which are not required but recommended.

Immunization protects students in schools because it lessens the risks of an outbreak.

Sherlock explained that immunization also protects students who can't be immunized, like students going through cancer treatment, if there is an outbreak.

"I'll give the example of pertussis because pertussis is now covered under the ISPA. Recently, there was a pertussis outbreak up in Bancroft. In the school we were able to run the report, figure out who was covered for pertussis in the immunization and who was not. So we ran the report and then we ran a notice home to all the parents stating there's an outbreak [and] an immunization is required. If you don't get an immunization then your student will be excluded from school," told Sherlock. "That's in place to protect the kids, we don't want those kids who aren't immunized to be exposed to pertussis. Then we also gave them the option to be immunized and stay in school."

He added, "It's just to prevent outbreaks within the community because if we didn't do anything then it could spread from there into other schools and go on further from there. The other thing that it does with the ISPA is increasing the immunization rate. You increase the rate to a level of herd immunity so most immunization you need about 95 per cent to 98 per cent of the school to be immunized in order to protect those who aren't able to be immunized. There's this herd effect so it protects the kids that are immune compromised. Say there's a child in the school undergoing chemotherapy. They can't be immunized, they're vulnerable. The herd is protecting that child from measles. If only half the children are immunized, you're still going to get outbreaks into the classrooms."

More information about the HPV vaccination can be found at the Ministry of Health and Long Term Care and the HPEPH websites.