



How Can I Protect My Kids from STDs? What you can do now to help them later!

Vincent E. Gil, Ph.D. ▪ December, 2021

YOU MAY BE EXPERIENCING COVID FATIGUE, and the last thing you want to think about is how to protect your children from *another* disease! And yet, many families during the COVID years have had their children grow into puberty and adolescence. . .some have maturing teens, now into the later years of high school.

Before these leave your nest, and before you awaken to the fact that your pubescent children, and certainly your adolescents have developed sexually, it would be wise to consider how you as a parent can truly help protect them from one of the most insidious of sexually transmitted diseases—the *Human Papilloma Virus*, or HPV.

If you didn't know, here are some statistics that you need to know:

- HPV is *the most common* sexually transmitted disease today (2021)
- Most infections are occurring in the late teen and early 20's groups of individuals
- Girls/young women are disproportionately infected, but boys/young men are also infected
- While there are many "clades" or versions of the virus, many cause significant health problems, including abnormal PAP tests, genital warts, and cancers
- Fortunately, there is a great and effective vaccine and steps you can take as a parent to help your adolescent child avoid the complications of HPV!

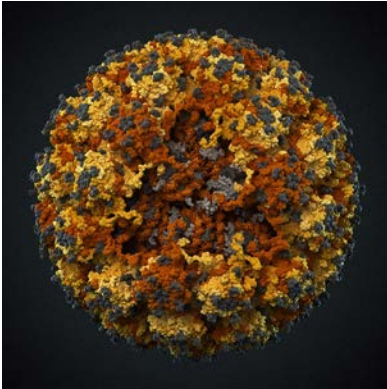
The Stark Reality

I'd love to assume that having raised your children in a Christian home, perhaps attending Christian schools, and seeing them involved in Church are all defenses that would guard them against premature, and often experimental sexual behavior. But you and I know that being Christian itself, and being involved, only lessens the opportunities for many, but does not take away the influences that surround adolescents today.

And you know what these are: social media, friend cliques, a culture of narcissism, and the inevitable budding of sexuality: urges, attractions, pheromones, glandular development, gee: throw in the kitchen sink!

All of these pose burdens on your children, on how to learn to think wisely about sexuality, and how to understand that if they do “fool around,” there are risks involved—many of great magnitude—and I don’t just mean *pregnancy*, although of course, that is central.

STDs today are epidemic. I know, that’s the *last word* you want to hear right now. But I can’t hide this truth in this article: STDs among young folk are, and have been for the last decade, of epidemic proportions. Some STDs like HPV are climbing to the top of the list in their transmissibility and effects.



HPV is a virus, and as a consequence has no cure, but it can be successfully treated—and for many of its most malignant “clades” there IS a vaccine!

The virus is spread by having sexual contact. Let’s be explicit here for the sake of understanding: I am talking about any type of sexual “contact” (oral, vaginal, anal, contact with sexual fluids, etc.) It does **not** have to be *penetrative sex*. In fact, an infected person can shed the virus through saliva only. (So much for French kisses!)

Most important to detail here is that there are many individuals who carry HPV that are *asymptomatic*, meaning they show no symptoms, even though the virus may be circulating and doing damage or be dormant in them. **These can certainly transmit the virus.** And, anyone who is sexually active can get HPV, even if the person has only had sex with only one other. If that other has had sex with *another individual*, one may become susceptible to infection.¹

What Kinds of Health Problems?

The clades that are most concerning are those that carry the potential for causing **genital warts** (which can also appear in other parts of the body as well), **and cancers**. HPV can and does cause *cervical cancers*, including cancers of the vulva, vagina. It can cause *penile cancers* in boys/men. And in both, it can also cause cancer in the *back of the throat*, including base of the tongue and tonsils (“*oropharyngeal cancers*”).

Because HPV has no cure, once it is acquired, and even though treated with various methods and drugs, the body takes a hit. People with HPV will develop **weak immune systems** (now we know what that’s all about!), and may thus be more likely to develop health problems from HPV.

¹ Medical information and data being reported come from sources from the Centers for Disease Control and Investigation (CDC), as well as from Medscape: <https://www.cdc.org>; <https://www.medscape.org>.

The Good News—There IS Good News Here!

There is a vaccine that has now been effective for more than a decade to guard young persons,,especially from those clades that cause such havoc: **Gardasil**. It can protect against the most severe clades, against developing cancers; and it has been proven safe and effective! **Gardasil** is called a “9-valent vaccine,” and uses recombinant DNA from attenuated virus. All that means the following: It is a vaccine that protects against the nine (9) most virulent clades of HPV (Types 6, 11, 16, 18, 31, 33, 45, 52, and 58) by using attenuated viral particles to form immunity in the vaccine recipient’s system—much like other vaccines also do. By covering these nine strains, **Gardasil** is preventing cervical, vulvar, vagina, anal, mouth and throat and other head and neck cancers caused by HPV. It is also protecting from the **wart lesions** that are caused by HPV types 6 and 11.

What You Can Do

You can get your pre/adolescent vaccinated! *Gardasil* is safe and effective when given, especially, before an adolescent becomes sexually active.

Thus, the recommended age for vaccination is between the ages of 11-12 (it can be given as early as 9), and is recommended for everyone through age 26. If an adult tests *negative* for HPV (and if a woman, for cervical cancers or *dysplasia*) and is beyond 26, the vaccine is then recommended through age 45.

The Myths and Misinformation to Guard Against Today

We seem to live in a war against science and vaccinations. And yet, most Americans have routinely given their children Polio, tetanus, diphtheria (DPT combo vaccines), other vaccinations routinely, and have also complied with state and local mandates for vaccinations to engage public schools. Many are now realizing the necessity for adding COVID vaccines to the list, to keep their kids and other family from exposure hazards. Kudos to these!

I am appealing here to a Christian audience: Do not let the significant wars on truth and in politics sidetrack you from doing what you may have already been historically doing for your children: Protecting them medically from disease dangers.

Do not let fake news and public media assaults deny you from considering the necessity for continuing age-appropriate vaccinations for your children!

Do not presume that your Christian heritage and all the work you’ve put into raising your child with moral values will contain the flood of other influences. Yes, we pray God’s protection. Yes, we hope they will make wise choices. We should also “yes” the fact that WE parents can still do something to *help them*, by vaccinating them against HPV: to insure that IF they do cross the sexual line, *at least* this level of protection is in them. I have had many a parent wish

that they would have vaccinated their children after the fact. And I have had students wish that their parents would have vaccinated them! (Talking about my former college students, who were, BTW, Christians with HPV!)

To those that argue, “Yes, but if I vaccinate, isn’t that a license for promiscuity?” — my professional and Christian answer, is of course, “No, it’s not.” First of all, if the child is a pre/adolescent, don’t be naïve enough to think that these haven’t already learned much more about sexuality than you may have during the same age. Do *you* know their sexual lives? Second, protection is protection regardless. I had one Christian couple encounter HPV years into their marriage, showing up as abnormal PAP smears in the wife, and no symptoms in the husband. Both had had sex before marriage, but as Christians, “limited.” They never realized that what they had done in late adolescence would have later effects in their married life—and yet it did. Finally, if you’ve taught your son or daughter to honor their body, then this is one more layer of “honor” that you give them: the vaccine is a protector, not an encourager for sex.

Call Your Pediatrician!

Gardasil has been on the radar for most pediatric doctors, and for most parents who understand that children/adolescents/teens today have deep problems maintaining any virginity till marriage. *Gardasil* is readily available, and covered by most insurances.

As a parent, God has entrusted to you your child(ren), their care and protection (Ps 137:3–5). Isn’t it within this premise that we do *all we can*—socially, economically, spiritually, and *medically*, for them?

You can read more about HPV and the vaccine at:
<https://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/stdfact-hpv.htm>.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



VINCENT E. GIL, PH.D., FAACS, is Emeritus Professor of Medical & Psychological Anthropology and Human Sexuality at Vanguard University. His Ph.D. in Medical and Psychological Anthropology is from UCLA, and included coursework at UCLA’s Neuropsychiatric Institute. His postdoctoral in Sexual Sciences (Clinical and Medical) is from The Masters and Johnson Institute, followed by a second postdoctoral in Public Health Epidemiology (Sexual Diseases) from UCLA. His recent book, *“A Christian’s Guide through the Gender Revolution”* (Cascade, 2020) gives voice to understanding gender and intersexuality as well as addresses a theology of being that reflects Jesus’ care and concern for all. Dr. Gil is a licensed minister with the SoCal Network of the Assemblies of God, and a member minister of the support network of United Evangelical Churches. Dr. Gil can be contacted at vgil@vanguard.edu.

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