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HPV Vaccine Side Effects

After my May 12 blog entry on the low rate of HPV vaccination, many readers voiced concerns about the risk of severe HPV vaccine side effects.

To bring perspective to the discussion of vaccine risks in general and HPV vaccine risks in particular, I'd like to make a few more points.

Is the HPV vaccine safe?

The vaccine has been licensed as safe. Before it was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), the vaccine was studied in thousands of girls and women age 9 through 26 in the United States and around the world. The most common side effect is soreness where the shot is given, in the arm.

What about the frightening reports from VAERS?

VAERS stands for Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System. It is a national vaccine safety surveillance program co-sponsored by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the FDA.

VAERS collects and analyzes information from reports of side effects after immunizations, so it serves as an early warning system for problems that may be related to a vaccine. The system helps to identify any important new safety concerns and thereby assists in making sure the benefits of the vaccines continue to be far greater than the risks.

Reports to VAERS do nothing to prove that particular vaccines cause specific adverse events. The only thing inclusion in VAERS means is that the reported event occurred after vaccination. Anyone can submit a report to VAERS, although health care providers are required to report certain adverse events.

How many reports of HPV vaccination-related adverse events has VAERS received?

At last count (June 2008), VAERS had received a total of 9,749 reports of potential adverse events following HPV vaccination. Ninety-four percent of these reports were about non-serious adverse events such as pain with the injection, or redness and swelling afterwards.

Six percent of adverse events reported for the HPV vaccine were considered serious. That's about half of the average number of serious events reported for other vaccines. Keep in mind that the rate is 6 percent of all reported HPV vaccine side effects, not 6 percent of all girls who had the vaccine.

Many of the problems reported to VAERS are chance occurrences. They are as likely to have showed up shortly before the vaccination as after it. Sometimes, problems reported to VAERS actually stem from medications unrelated to the vaccine, or from undiagnosed illness. Sometimes there's no identifiable cause.

VAERS data are routinely updated, and the number of reports and the type of adverse events will vary depending on the date of analysis. Free [Medical Advice](#) published By [Dr Vivienne Balonwu](#).

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