

HPV Knowledge and Education

Report on vaccination data from a national health trends survey

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BACKGROUND: Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection worldwide. Several government agencies are working to achieve the Healthy People 2020 goal of reaching 80% HPV vaccination rates for adolescent males and females in the United States.

OBJECTIVES: The aim of this article is to identify trends in the knowledge of the U.S. population as related to the understanding of HPV, areas for nurse–patient education, and methods used in other countries that have achieved 80% HPV vaccination rates.

METHODS: A cross-sectional analysis of Health Information National Trends Survey questions related to HPV infections and the HPV vaccine from 2005–2018 was completed to determine the knowledge of HPV infections and the HPV vaccine.

FINDINGS: There has been little to no growth in HPV knowledge in the general population in the United States from 2005 to 2018. Additional research is needed to address the ongoing barriers to increasing knowledge of HPV vaccination.

KEYWORDS

human papillomavirus; HINTS; vaccination rates; knowledge; Healthy People 2020

DIGITAL OBJECT IDENTIFIER

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HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV) IS THE MOST COMMON sexually transmitted infection in the world (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2019b). HPV can infect men and women equally. About 80 million people in the United States are currently infected with 1 of the 150 strains of HPV (CDC, 2019a). Most strains are asymptomatic, and the infection will often resolve without additional treatment and, therefore, not cause additional health problems or concerns (CDC, 2019b). However, some strains of HPV cannot be cleared by the body, and the infection causes additional health problems and concerns, with the potential to have lasting effects for the infected individual. HPV infections have been linked to genital warts, respiratory papillomatosis, and cancers of the cervix, penis, vagina, vulva, anus, and oropharynx (CDC, 2019a). With the creation and release of the first HPV vaccine in 2006, and an updated version of the HPV vaccine increasing coverage from four strains to nine strains of HPV in 2014, a significant impact can be made on HPV infection rates. In addition, there is the potential of creating a generation where HPV infections can be significantly diminished or eradicated, and the rates of cervical and other cancers caused by HPV infection significantly decreased. The purpose of this article is to review and analyze nationally available cross-sectional survey data from the National Cancer Institute (NCI) on the knowledge of HPV and HPV vaccination rates in the general population of the United States. By identifying and understanding the HPV knowledge gaps, nurses can target education to improve rates of HPV vaccination.

HPV and HPV Vaccination

HPV was initially discovered in 1956, with a potential link noted between HPV infections and cervical cancer (Smith, 2014). Dr. George Papanicolaou is credited with developing the screening tool used to look for abnormal cervical cells under a microscope, and this simple screening test was adopted by doctors in the 1960s for use in the general population (Smith, 2014). However, the discovery of the linkage between HPV infections, genital warts, and cervical cancer was not made until 1984 by German virologist Harold zur Hausen (Smith, 2014). Using prior research that linked a type of papillomavirus to warts and cancer in rabbits, zur Hausen and his team discovered that there were many different strains of HPV, and several of these strains were