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New Vaccine Developed for HPV Virus

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The first vaccines with 100 percent efficacy in combating the most dangerous types of the human papilloma virus (HPV) are soon to be released to the open market.

Merck and GlaxoSmithKline are two drug companies which produce the preventative vaccines (HPV infection that leads to 70 percent of cervical cancer cases). Both vaccines have been under development for a decade.

There are over 100 strains of HPV with more than 30 transmitted through sexual contact. Most strains are harmless, but some cause genital infections such as warts and several types of cancers, the most common being of the cervix.

Cervical cancer affects women at a younger age than most cancers. It is the second leading cause of death for women with cancer, claiming 4,000 women in the US alone and 300,000 worldwide each year.

The Merck vaccine called Gardasil is to be released in the fall of 2006. Gardasil protects against HPV 16 and 18, which account for 70 percent of cervical cancer risk, as well as types 6 and 11 which are directly linked to genital warts.

GlaxoSmithKline's vaccine called Cervarix targets mainly HPV 16 and 18. It is expected to be released in the spring of 2007.

In a study involving over 1,100 women between the ages of 15 and 25, some were given Cervarix and some were given placeboes. Researchers followed up on 776 of the women

and found that all who had received Cervarix still tested positive for being immunized against HPV 16 and 18 after four and a half years. Cervarix was also found to be protective against types 31 and 45 of HPV with no side effects.

These vaccines were designed to protect women from the HPV virus and are only effective if the recipient has not been sexually active.

This is why the makers of these vaccines strongly suggest having girls as young as ten become vaccinated. Even teenagers and young adults who have not been sexually active can receive a vaccine.

"I would like to see it that if you don't have your HPV vaccine, you can't start high school," said Juan Carlos Felix of the University of Southern California, who leads the National Cervical Cancer

Coalition's medical advisory panel.

Those who have been sexually active receive no benefit from the vaccines. At least half of the sexually active people receive HPV at some point in their lifetime.

There has been discussion on whether to use the vaccines on males to limit the spread of the virus. Men are carriers of HPV, though it usually doesn't affect them. There are no tests available to diagnose HPV in men and many may not know they have the symptoms.

How these vaccines will be used is determined by the Advisory Committee on Immunization practices. This panel of experts issue widely followed guidelines, including recommendations for vaccinations that become requirements set by public schools.