

Katie Couric Is Slammed for Linking Harms to HPV Vaccine

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Numerous press outlets have heaped criticism on Katie Couric for making scientifically unfounded claims on her daytime talk show linking the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine to dangerous side effects. A near-half-hour segment on the December 4 episode of Katie, which has an average viewership of 2.7 million, lent the stage to, among others, a pair of mothers who professed that the vaccine seriously harmed their young daughters. One of them said she believes that a 2008 administration of the vaccine led to her daughter's death, and the other claimed the vaccine caused her child to develop a mysterious illness characterized by nausea and fatigue.

Despite the fact that there is no scientific evidence that the HPV vaccine causes anything past ordinary, relatively benign side effects typical of a vaccine, Couric framed the report as if there were a worthy debate to be had weighing the risks and benefits of the vaccine. A [page](#) on her show's website devoted to the episode encourages viewers to "hear all sides of the HPV vaccine controversy."

Between June 2006 and March 2013, nearly 57 million HPV vaccine doses were administered in the United States, leading to about 22,000 adverse side effects (around 1 out of every 40,000 doses), 92 percent percent of which were "non-serious." Meanwhile, HPV is the leading cause of cervical cancer, which strikes 12,000 women a year, and can also cause vulvar, vaginal, penile, anal, and neck and throat cancers.

Such cancers are a larger concern for people with HIV. What's more, HPV is believed to facilitate transmission of the virus, for example by making it easier for the virus to permeate the genital lining, and by raising inflammation, which increases the availability of cells for HIV to target and thus establish an infection.

Diane Harper, MD, MPH, a professor at the University of Missouri-Kansas City who was a head researcher for Gardasil, one of the two approved HPV vaccines, claimed on the show that the vaccine's efficacy drops off after five years. Research does not support this claim.

Time magazine ran an editorial titled "Is Katie Couric the Next Jenny McCarthy?" in reference to the television personality and former Playboy Playmate who has waged a campaign against childhood vaccines despite the vast scientific research debunking her claim that they are linked to autism. The article quotes Seth Mnookin, author of *The Panic Virus: The True Story Behind the*

Vaccine-Autism Controversy, who says in reference to the Couric show, “This kind of coverage is so incredibly irresponsible. The danger of saying we are going to present both sides of an issue, when all of the facts line up on one side, is that as far as the audience is concerned, you are giving these sides equal weight. It presents a false impression that there is a legitimate debate here.”

To read the Time magazine piece, [click here](#).

To read the Slate piece, [click here](#).

To read the Salon piece, [click here](#).

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