No, the HPV Vaccine Does Not Lead to Riskier Sexual Behaviors in Girls

Many parents of adolescent girls have resisted the human papillomavirus vaccine for fear it will have negative behavioral consequences.

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The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine is not associated with an increase in risky sexual behaviors among adolescent girls. On the contrary, measures of sexual risk taking tended to decline after girls in British Columbia received the vaccine.

Publishing their findings in CMAJ (Canadian Medical Association Journal), researchers examined changes in behaviors among girls after the 2008 introduction in British Columbia of a publicly funded HPV vaccination program for girls in grades 6 and 9. Starting in 2011, the program narrowed its focus to grade 6 only.

“The HPV vaccine has proved to be a remarkably effective and safe vaccine,” the study’s lead author, Gina Ogilvie, MD, MSc, of the School of Population and Public Health at the University of British Columbia, said in a press release.“However, parents have expressed concern that the use of the HPV vaccine might promote or condone risky sexual behavior in adolescents.”

Ogilvie and her team analyzed data from the BC Adolescent Health Survey, a population-based survey of students in British Columbia in grades 7 through 12 conducted every five years. The researchers for the new study looked at data from the 2003, 2008 and 2014 surveys, which included responses from more than 300,000 girls.

The proportion of girls reporting ever having had sex declined from 21.3 percent in 2004 to 20.6 percent in 2008 and 18.3 percent in 2013. The proportion of girls reporting having had intercourse before age 14 declined between 2008 and 2018, and the percentage reporting condom use increased from 65.6 percent to 68.9 percent during this period.

After adjusting the data to account for differences in age, the researchers found that after receiving the HPV vaccine, girls were 21 percent less likely to report having had sexual intercourse, 18 percent less likely to report having had intercourse before age 14, 31 percent less

likely to report using substances before intercourse and 44 percent less likely to report having been pregnant. Additionally, after getting the vaccine, girls were 19 percent more likely to report using condoms and 43 percent more likely to report using birth control pills. The vaccine was not associated with any change in the proportion of girls reporting three or more partners in the last year.

To read a press release about the study, click here.

To read the study abstract, click here.

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