

Human Papilloma Virus vaccines may decrease chances of oral cancer

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The Centers for Disease Control report that nearly 25 million women are infected with some form of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). Of those, more than three million are thought to have one of the four strains known to cause cases of cervical cancer and genital warts.

HPV is linked to oropharyngeal cancer and may be linked to oral cancers as well, and vaccines that have been developed to treat HPV might decrease the risk of these cancers, according to a study in the May/June issue of *General Dentistry*, the clinical, peer-reviewed journal of the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD).

James J. Closmann, BS, DDS, the lead author of the study, found that oral and oropharyngeal squamous cell carcinoma (OOSCC) have been linked to high-risk HPV strains, the same strains that cause cervical cancer.

Recently, a vaccine was developed to treat patients with HPV against cervical cancer, and this could have an effect on women's oral health.

"More than 100 strains of HPV have been identified," says Dr. Closmann. "They have been shown to cause other benign and malignant disorders, which now include those in the mouth. Nearly 30,000 new cases of oral and oropharyngeal cancer are reported each year. It's possible that oral and oropharyngeal cancers could be reduced if vaccination were more widespread; however, additional research is needed."

Additional research could result in a comprehensive test for dentists at patients' semiannual visits. However, a dentist can perform a head and neck exam to detect early signs, despite the lack of a specific test. A possible connection between HPV and oral cancers, and the stronger link to oropharyngeal cancers, is even more of an indicator that patients should visit the dentist twice a year to identify irregularities early.

"Visiting the dentist on a regular basis is an important factor in the detection of any oral health complication," says Laura Murcko, DMD, spokesperson for the AGD. "Taking preventive measures is especially important, and your dentist can check for early signs of oral cancer."

Oral Health Tips for Women:

- Keep your dentist informed about changes in oral health.
- Visit the dentist regularly, which will help them to detect changes in the mouth.
- Ask your dentist to take a full medical history to determine if you are at risk for certain problems.
- Ask your dentist to perform a complete a head and neck exam to detect early signs of certain conditions.

Source: Academy of General Dentistry

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