Primary Care Physicians Play Key Role in Promoting HPV Vaccine to Boys' Parents

Most parents of boys aged 9 to 18 years do not know that an HPV vaccine is available for their sons. One major factor is a lack of information. This is where you play a vital role.

The majority of parents of boys aged 9 to 18 years do not know that a human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine is available for their sons, even though most have heard that such a vaccine exists, according to the results of a new study presented at IDWeek 2013 in San Francisco.

“One major factor contributing to low vaccination rates in males is a lack of information and understanding about HPV disease and the vaccine in patients,” lead author Tina Tan, MD, of the Ann and Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago, told ConsultantLive. “Another contributing factor is concerns about vaccine side effects.”

Since the HPV quadrivalent vaccine was licensed in October 2009, vaccination rates for boys have remained extremely low, less than 6.8% nationally. Dr Tan and colleagues administered a 20-question, anonymous survey to parents of boys aged 9 to 18 years who obtained their medical care from several private pediatrics’ offices and several public health clinics in Chicago. The survey assessed awareness and perceived risk for HPV infection, and awareness and acceptance of HPV vaccination.

Some 286 public health clinic (PHC) parents and 230 private physicians’ offices (PPO) parents completed the survey. More than 90% of the PPO parents and two-thirds of the PHC parents had heard of HPV; less than 40% of PPO parents and less than 20% of PHC parents knew that HPV was associated with genital warts and male oral/anogenital cancers. Three-quarters of the PPO parents and half of the PHC parents knew HPV was sexually transmitted.

About 87% of the PPO parents had heard of the HPV vaccine, but only 43% knew that the HPV vaccine was available for boys. Just more than half of the PHC parents had heard of the vaccine and about one-quarter knew it was for boys.

For both groups, a recommendation by a health care provider was the primary influence for getting a vaccination. The major barrier to vaccination was a lack of information on HPV disease and HPV vaccine.

“To improve vaccination rates, information about HPV disease and vaccine needs to be provided to parents to inform them on the consequences of infection and on the importance of prevention,” said Dr Tan. “They also need to understand that the best time to administer the vaccine is before onset of sexual activity. If given at the recommended time of 11 to 12 years of age, there is a better immune response then if given at an older age.”

Importantly, many studies show that parents rely on their primary care provider for recommendations for receiving vaccines. However, many providers are not familiar with the recommendations for use of the vaccine in males. “It is critically important that education of health care providers continue to emphasize the recommendations and the importance of administering HPV vaccine to males to protect against genital warts and anogenital cancers,” she said. “Health care providers need to be proactive in the prevention of HPV disease in their patients.”