



NEWS RELEASE

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HPV completion rates in Iowa remain low despite cancer-preventing benefits *New data shows only 33 percent of adolescents received the required second dose*

DES MOINES, Iowa (April 27, 2021) — Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination rates for adolescents (ages 10-13) in Iowa are above the national average, according to a [data](#) by the Blue Cross Blue Shield Association (BCBSA). While the overall rate of those receiving their initial HPV vaccination in Iowa increased – from 39 percent in 2016 to 63 percent in 2019, the number of adolescents returning to complete the second HPV dose remains at just 33 percent, just slightly above the national average of 29 percent.

“The HPV vaccine can safely prevent multiple cancers, yet just one-third of Iowa’s adolescents are fully vaccinated,” said Dr. Tim Gutshall, Wellmark’s chief medical officer. “HPV can exist for years without symptoms and is a leading cause of cervical cancer in women and throat cancer in men. It is important for parents and caregivers to understand the benefits of this vaccine and the importance of following through with both doses to ensure the best protection.”

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer among women globally, while certain throat cancer diagnoses are rising at unprecedented rates among both men and women. HPV is responsible for 70 to 90 percent of these cancers in the U.S. Two doses of the HPV vaccine are required for full immunity among this age group. The CDC recommends the vaccine for girls and boys between the ages of 10 and 13.

BCBSA data shows nearly equal vaccine completion rates in Iowa among girls and boys although those numbers have declined when compared to earlier data. Thirty four percent of girls completed the HPV vaccine in 2019, down from 38 percent in 2016. Among boys, 32 percent were fully vaccinated compared to 40 percent in 2016. The COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to further decrease HPV vaccination rates in Iowa similar to [declines seen with other routine childhood vaccines](#).

Among parents whose children did not receive the HPV vaccine: 29 percent were unsure about the vaccine’s effectiveness; 25 percent declined the vaccine because it wasn’t required; and 22 percent had concerns over side effects.

“The HPV vaccine can have a true impact on preventing cancers — but children need to be vaccinated early according to CDC guidance,” said Dr. Gutshall. “Even as the pandemic persists, I continue to encourage parents to work with their primary care provider to stay on schedule or catch up with this, and other important vaccines.”

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