Kansas tied for lowest rate of teen HPV vaccination

The Topeka-Capital Journal

Teenagers are less likely to be vaccinated against human papillo-

mavirus in Kansas than they are in almost any other state — a fact

that needs to change to prevent future health problems, according to

a group advocating for public health.

John Eplee, a phy-

sician and chair of

the Immunize Kansas

Coalition, said the coa-
lition formerly focused

on encouraging early

childhood vaccinations,

but decided to focus on

vaccinations needed in

adolescence because of

their low rates in Kansas.

Teens in the state have

the lowest vaccination

rate in the country for

HPV and are in the bot-
tom quarter for menin-

goecoccal meningitis, he

said.

"There's basically one

way to go and that's to

improve," he said.

Only 21 percent of

teens in Kansas have

received all three doses

of the vaccine to protect

against HPV, which was

tied for the lowest rate

in the country in 2013,

Eplee said. The Centers

for Disease Control and

Prevention recommend

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that boys and girls be

vaccinated at age 11 or

12, before sexual activ-

ity begins.

According to the

CDC, most people who

are sexually active at

some point in their

lives contract at least

one form of HPV. Most

strains cause no symp-
	

toms, but others cause

cancer in the cervix,

vulva, vagina, penis,

anus or throat, depend-

ing on the location of

infection. The virus also

can cause genital warts.

Some parents have

concerns about vacci-
nating their children

against a sexually

transmitted disease,

Eplee said, and some

teens are scared off by

the discomfort from

the shot. Also, not all

insurance plans cover it

because it isn't legally

required, he said.

Vaccinating for me-

ningoecoccal meningitis

doesn't raise the same

concerns as HPV, Eplee

said, but only about 56

percent of Kansas teens

have received at least

one dose of the vaccine.

Teens are best protect-
ed if they get their first

dose at 13 or 14 and

another when they are

getting ready to go to

college, he said.

"There's always a risk

(of meningitis) when

you get a high density

of young people togeth-

er," he said.

Meningitis is an

infection of the brain

and spinal cord, and

sometimes of the blood-

stream. Its symptoms

resemble influenza, but

without quick treat-

ment it can cause brain

damage, hearing loss,

neurological problems,

loss of limbs due to im-

paired circulation and

even death.

The coalition isn't

looking for a legal re-

quirement to vaccinate

teens, but to remind

doctors why they need
to discuss those vac-
cines with teens and

parents, Eplee said.

Some of the vaccines

are newer, and doctors

may not be accustomed
to discussing them, he

said.

"A lot of (parents),
they're not even aware

there's an opportunity

and they need to get

this," he said. "In a per-
fect world, these would

be required vaccines

like the pediatric vac-
cines."

The coalition includes

Stornont-Vail Health-

Care; University of

Kansas Medical Center;

Child Care Aware; Kan-
sas Academy of Family

Physicians; Kansas Ac-

tion for Children; Kan-
sas Association for the

Medically Underserved;

American Academy of

Pediatrics; Kansas

Department of Health

and Environment;

Kansas Foundation for

Medical Care; Kansas

Head Start Association;

Kansas Health Insti-
tute; Kansas Healthcare

Collaborative; Kansas

Medical Mutual Insur-

ance Company; Kansas

Medical Society; Kansas

School Nurse Organiz-

ation; and the health

departments in Harvey,

Johnson, Reno, Saline,

Sedgwick, Wilson and

Wyandotte counties.