



Title: **Kansas tied for lowest rate of teen HPV vaccination**
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Kansas tied for lowest rate of teen HPV vaccination

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Teenagers are less likely to be vaccinated against human papillomavirus 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-

RATE

that boys and girls be vaccinated at age 11 or 12, before sexual activity 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 symptoms, but others cause cancer in the cervix, vulva, vagina, penis, anus or throat, depending on the location of infection. The virus also can cause genital warts.

Some parents have concerns about vaccinating 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

sician and chair of the Immunize Kansas Coalition, said the coalition 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

required, he said.

Vaccinating for meningococcal 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 protected 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 together," he said.

Meningitis is an infection of the brain and spinal cord, and sometimes of the bloodstream. Its symptoms resemble influenza, but without quick treat-

the lowest vaccination rate in the country for HPV and are in the bottom quarter for meningococcal 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

ment it can cause brain damage, hearing loss, neurological problems, loss of limbs due to impaired circulation and even death.

The coalition isn't looking for a legal requirement to vaccinate teens, but to remind doctors why they need to discuss those vaccines 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 perfect world, these would be required vaccines like the pediatric vaccines."

The coalition includes

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

See RATE on page A6

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