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St. Croix Valley works to improve HPV vaccination rates

ST. Croix, Pierce and Polk Counties, ---St. Croix Valley Immunization Coalition is joining a national effort to improve rates of vaccinating teens against a virus that causes cancer.

Figures from 2013, the latest available, show that 18.3 percent of western Wisconsin teens ages 13 to 17 had received the three vaccinations necessary to prevent human papillomavirus infection, which can cause cervical, anal and oral cancers. The overall 2013 Wisconsin vaccination rate was 19 percent.

“We know that the St. Croix Valley can do better, and our New Year’s resolution for 2015 is to improve our vaccination rates,” says Sharon Reyzer, of the St. Croix County Health Department.

The St. Croix Valley Immunization Coalition includes Polk, Pierce and Saint Croix counties. It was one of sixteen local coalitions to receive a grant from the Wisconsin Immunization Program and the Wisconsin Comprehensive Cancer Control Program (WCCCP) to promote and support HPV vaccine-related activities within their communities. The coalition will be providing onsite education to local Health Care Providers, conduct a media campaign and outreach activities to raise awareness of HPV vaccine and cancer prevention.

Dr. Noelle LoConte, associate professor of medicine at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, says that because the HPV virus is known to cause cancer, getting the vaccine is one of the surest ways to prevent cancer.

“One of the Wisconsin Comprehensive Cancer Control Plan’s goals is to reduce the risk of people in our state getting cancer,” says Dr. Noelle LoConte, an oncologist.

“By increasing the use of the HPV vaccine statewide, we are closing the door to cancer for our children’s generation.”

LoConte is a member of the UW Carbone Cancer Center, one of 18 National Cancer Institute centers that received grants to improve HPV vaccine rates. The NCI centers are meeting this week about improving HPV vaccination rates nationwide.

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