

# Community Success Story: HPV Vaccine, "HPV Free in the Western U.P."

## Western Upper Peninsula Health Department

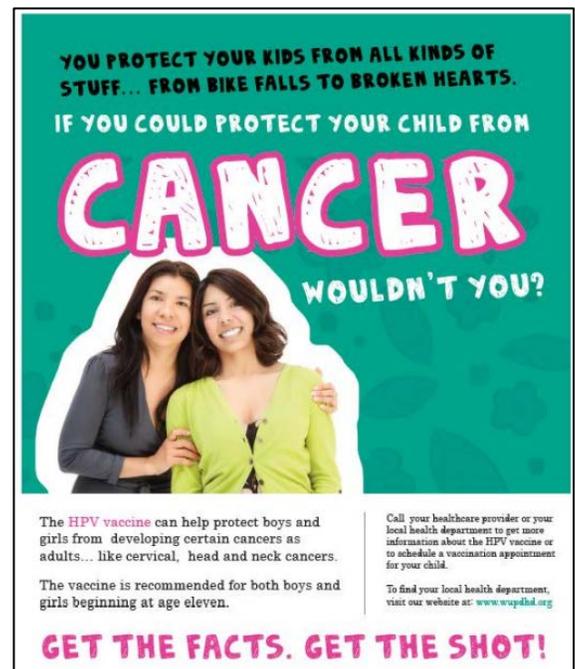
### Summary

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection, and most sexually active people will have HPV at some time in their lives. HPV is the primary cause of cervical cancer in women, causing more than 12,000 cases and 4,000 deaths per year in the United States. It also causes HPV related cancers in men.

The Western Upper Peninsula (U.P.) Health Department embarked on a yearlong project to combat the misinformation regarding the human papillomavirus (HPV) and HPV vaccine in the community, which was believed to be resulting in low vaccination rates in the five counties the health department serves. At the time this project began only 5% of age-eligible individuals had received even one dose of the vaccine.

The health department conducted a widespread health communication campaign to increase public awareness of HPV and the vaccine among 11-26 year olds and to increase cervical cancer screening among women 21-44 years of age.

*Contact Information:*  
Western U.P. Health Department  
[www.wupdhd.org/](http://www.wupdhd.org/)



Slogan and example material used in  
education campaign

### Challenges

The vaccine against HPV is effective, but there is much incorrect information that circulates, and discussing a vaccine against a sexually transmitted infection with parents can be difficult because the vaccine is recommended for both males and females starting at age 11. These issues have undoubtedly contributed to low rates across the nation and in the Western U.P.

The HPV vaccine can also be difficult to afford for those without insurance. The Western U.P. Health Department had to work with state and local resources to remove this barrier.

## Solutions

The Western U.P. Health Department launched a widespread health communication campaign to increase public awareness of HPV and the vaccine and to increase cervical cancer screening among women 21-44 years of age. To ensure these women had insurance that covered the cost of the vaccine we enrolled women in Plan First. Plan First covers women of child bearing years (ages 19 through 44) who are not eligible for Medicaid and whose other insurance does not cover family planning services, and whose income level is at or below 185 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. This ensured that women had access to the vaccine and that cost was not a barrier. The health department was also able to partner with Merck to cover the cost of doses for women who were not eligible for Plan First and could not afford the cost of the vaccine.

A graduate student intern from Michigan Tech University provided assistance in crafting the outreach campaign and developing materials. She was able to tailor HPV messages to the populations that we were targeting, which included college campuses.

The campaign was conducted through meetings and media. Public health nurses set up and completed 15 “Lunch and Learn” sessions in all five counties with area providers and their staff, to educate and inform about HPV and the vaccine. The extensive education campaign also included presentations at Women’s Health conferences, Parent Teacher conferences, local service groups (i.e. Rotary), local colleges training nurses, and public school Superintendents at their roundtable meetings. Media activity included several newspaper articles, PSA’s on local radio, and live radio interviews. Ads for HPV and Plan First were developed and placed in the local newspapers in all counties, and a Facebook page was developed.

## Results

One objective was to increase community awareness about HPV, its associated cancer risk, and the effectiveness of vaccination and screening in preventing cervical cancer, by 25% over baseline measures. Pre and post client/community surveys demonstrated a more modest but significant improvement in knowledge among community members.

The other objectives were to increase HPV vaccines administered to 11-26 year olds by 10% over the year and increase Pal First enrollment. At the end of the health department is pleased to report that, in fact, the number of doses administered by providers across the five-county district increased by an outstanding 75%. Enrollment of women in to Plan First remained stable, reflecting the fact that health department staff were already highly successful at capturing eligible women who came to us for services. We were, however, unable to significantly increase enrollments across the community at large above our baseline.

## Sustainability

Continued outreach is planned for all of the communities. In an area where resources are limited, the dedication and capability of health department staff is the greatest assets. Health department staff know the communities and how to reach targeted populations, including the providers and can continue to educate and share information through already established site visits for immunizations. As a hub for health-related services in the area, local public health is able to identify opportunities across programs that will sustain this important educational campaign for all counties served.

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