



# New Jersey legislators seek mandatory HPV vaccine

By Roland Zemla

[Daily Targum](#) (Rutgers)  
01/23/2007

**(U-WIRE) NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J.** -- As the rush to encourage early vaccination of children and young women against the Human Papilloma Virus steadily increases nationwide, New Jersey Assemblyman Bill Baroni and Assemblywoman Jennifer Beck have introduced a bill that would require health insurers to cover the cost of routine vaccinations to prevent HPV, the virus that causes cervical cancer.

"It is absolutely vital for HPV education, vaccination and awareness to become a central issue in health care management in states across the nation. I thank the New Jersey legislature, especially Assemblyman Baroni and [Assemblywoman] Beck for joining with us in our campaign to prevent HPV from affecting the lives of our patients," said Dr. Martin Martino, a 1993 Rutgers University graduate and gynecologic oncologist who practices at Lehigh Valley Hospital in Allentown, Pa.

HPV has long been recognized as the most significant source of cervical cancer in women. Although most HPV infections are benign -- non-cancerous -- some have the potential to result in genital warts and cervical cancer.

Nationwide, HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection, with 9,700 new cases estimated annually by the American Cancer Association. In 90 percent of cases involving cervical cancer, the presence of HPV has been detected.

The HPV vaccine, developed originally by the Whitehouse, N.J.-based pharmaceutical company Merck, in June 2006 became the first vaccine to be authorized by the Food and Drug Administration to prevent and reduce the chances of developing cervical cancer from an HPV infection by approximately 70 percent.

Recently, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices in the federal Centers for Disease Control released recommendations on the practice of vaccinating young girls aged 11-12, claiming HPV vaccination at or before this age is most effective, greatly due to the absence of sexual activity that promotes the transmission of HPV.

Scientific estimates have said the vaccination of 12-year-olds could reduce the number of HPV-related cervical cancer cases by more than 70 percent. "It is clear after reviewing several recently published studies that the HPV vaccination is very effective. If we can prevent one future patient from developing and dying from cervical cancer, then we have done our jobs," Martino said.

Merck has initiated a "One Less" campaign aimed at promoting the effectiveness of the vaccine worldwide. Now, the state legislature is taking on that responsibility.

The bill requires the establishment of a public awareness campaign to inform the public about the clinical significance and public health implications of HPV, including the causes of HPV as well as the most effective means of treatment and prevention.

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The bill was introduced last in November of the previous year and referred to the Assembly of Health and Senior Services Committee. It has been enacted by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey. A conference was held Sunday in Trenton, N.J.

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