WOMEN IN GOVERNMENT ISSUES STATE POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CERVICAL CANCER VACCINE

Recommendations Support Middle School Entry Requirement

Washington, DC --- September 12, 2006 --- Following the recent Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approval of a vaccine targeting cervical cancer, Women In Government, a national, bi-partisan, non-profit organization representing women state legislators, today recommended that all girls entering middle school be vaccinated against the human papillomavirus (HPV), the cause of cervical cancer. The recommendation is part of the group’s new policy recommendations for the HPV vaccine’s implementation in the states. The group also supports parental exemptions to the HPV vaccine, based on existing state immunization exemptions.

“The availability of an HPV vaccine brings us one step closer to making cervical cancer the first cancer we can eliminate,” said Susan Crosby, president of Women In Government. “However, to truly achieve this goal, we must make FDA-approved HPV vaccines available to all age-appropriate girls and women. That is what our recommendations, including the middle school entry requirement, are designed to do.” Ms. Crosby also noted that HPV vaccines must be part of a comprehensive approach to prevention that includes screening programs using advanced and appropriate technologies, such as HPV testing.

In June, the FDA approved an HPV vaccine, known as Gardasil, for girls and women aged 9 through 26. A federal advisory panel subsequently voted to recommend its routine use in girls aged 11 and 12 and, as appropriate, for the other approved age groups. The vaccine has been shown in clinical trials to be 100 percent effective at preventing disease from the two types of HPV that are responsible for approximately 70 percent of all cervical cancers. Clinical data also showed this HPV vaccine to be effective in targeting the two HPV types that cause 90 percent of genital warts. Another HPV vaccine, known as Cervarix, is in development and expected to be submitted to the FDA later this year.

The new HPV vaccine policy recommendations are part of Women In Government’s “Challenge to Eliminate Cervical Cancer Campaign,” which mobilizes state legislators to help eradicate cervical cancer through education and policy initiatives. Since 2004, 45 states have introduced legislation or resolutions tackling this issue.

Also today, Michigan became the first state to consider legislation requiring HPV vaccination for school entrance. State Senator Beverly Hammerstrom (R-Temperance), Michigan’s Majority Floor Leader and Chair of the Senate Health Policy Committee, today introduced legislation requiring inclusion of a cervical cancer vaccine on the immunization schedule for Michigan’s schools and academies. The vaccine would be required for girls entering the sixth grade, and would allow exemptions for medical, religious or philosophical reasons.

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“The only way to ensure that as many girls as possible receive the HPV vaccine is to require it before they enter middle school,” said Sen. Hammerstrom, who is also the immediate past chair of Women In Government. “Vaccines can save lives and policymakers have a responsibility to ensure access for constituents to these preventive technologies. I have significant support from my colleagues in the legislature on this issue and look forward to working with them to pass this bill.”

Women In Government’s HPV vaccine policy recommendations were developed by its bi-partisan HPV & Cervical Cancer Task Force and approved by its Board of Directors. The other recommendations are:

- **Vaccines for Children (VFC) Program** – States should direct dedicated funding streams to support VFC program infrastructure (e.g. administration, providers’ time, education, etc.), and state departments of health should develop and implement plans to ensure all girls and women aged 9 through 18 have access to and receive FDA-approved cervical cancer/HPV vaccines, with an emphasis on the routine vaccination of 11- and 12-year-old girls.

- **Health Coverage** – States should strongly encourage health plans to cover FDA-approved cervical cancer/HPV vaccines, Pap tests and HPV tests.

- **Access for Uninsured/Underinsured Not Covered by VFC** – States should require Medicaid to cover FDA-approved cervical cancer/HPV vaccines for eligible 19 to 26 year old women. States should ensure that public health programs are adequately funded (e.g. state general funds, 317 funds, Title X, etc.) and utilized to ensure that all other uninsured or underinsured females aged 9 to 26 have access to cervical cancer/HPV vaccination.

- **Education and Awareness** – Existing statewide entities focused on cancer prevention and/or health (e.g. statewide cervical cancer task forces, state health departments, women’s caucuses, etc.) should take the lead on developing and executing programs to educate and involve stakeholders (e.g. policymakers, providers, parents, young women, school administrators, etc.) about cervical cancer, HPV, and the role of available preventive technologies.

- **Role of Statewide Accountable Entities** – States should ensure that statewide cervical cancer task forces or other accountable entities are informed about and address new information and data about cervical cancer/HPV vaccines. States should consider that legislative action may be required to extend the parameters of task force timelines, membership, etc.

Sen. Hammerstrom is joined by other policymakers throughout the country who are preparing to introduce similar initiatives. “With the HPV vaccine, we have a huge opportunity to eliminate cervical cancer for New York women, particularly underserved women, who are at higher risk for the disease,” said New York State Senator Diane Savino (D-Staten Island/Brooklyn). “I look forward to working with the Health Department and my colleagues in the Assembly to make sure we get this vaccine to all age-appropriate girls and young women in the state.”

**About Cervical Cancer**

Worldwide, cervical cancer is the second leading cancer-killer of women, with almost a quarter-million deaths each year. In the United States, the American Cancer Society estimates 9,710 women will be diagnosed with and more than 3,700 women will die of cervical cancer in 2006. According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, approximately 20 million people are currently infected with HPV, with 6.2 million new infections occurring annually and approximately 80 percent of sexually active women will be infected with HPV by age 50. For 90 percent of infected women, the virus is naturally cleared by the body and becomes undetectable within two years. However, persistent infection with “high-risk” types of HPV can cause cell changes that, untreated, can lead to cervical cancer.

**About Women In Government**

Women In Government is a national, 501(c)(3), non-profit, bi-partisan organization of women state legislators providing leadership opportunities, networking, expert forums and educational resources to address and resolve complex public policy issues. For more information, visit [www.womeningovernment.org](http://www.womeningovernment.org).

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