



## Texas Catholic Bishops Statement on the HPV Vaccine Mandate

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On Friday, February 5, Governor Perry issued an executive order requiring the Texas Health and Human Services Commission to adopt rules requiring the new Gardasil vaccine for girls entering sixth grade as of September 2008. The vaccine is designed to protect girls against some strains of the human papillomavirus, or HPV, that cause most forms of cervical cancer.

The Roman Catholic Bishops of Texas appreciate the seriousness of this healthcare issue; HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the world and in the United States. The HPV vaccine is currently recommended by the CDC Committee on Immunization Practices and the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC) considers HPV vaccination to be a morally acceptable method of protecting against this disease.

However, we find the Governor's executive order to be problematic in several ways. Although the NCBC considers HPV vaccination to be morally acceptable, it has also recommended that civil authorities should leave this decision to parents and not to make such immunization mandatory at this time. Also, the American Academy of Pediatrics has judged that school-based mandatory HPV vaccination is premature and should await several years of practice before mandates are considered. The HPV vaccine is a new vaccine that has only been tested among girls 16 and older. While results from those tests have been encouraging, clinicians have very little experience administering the vaccine to 12 year old girls and the general public has very little knowledge of any of the possible negative side affects.

While the HPV vaccine offers hope for reducing the number of women developing cervical cancer, it is not a magic bullet and is only one avenue for disease prevention.

HPV is primarily spread through sexual contact which includes, but is not limited to, sexual intercourse. The prevalence of HPV among those of reproductive age makes exposure to the virus possible, even in a monogamous marriage, due to the possibility of a spouse's exposure prior to marriage. Furthermore, we live in a society where non-consensual sex remains a threat to young women who deserve to be protected from the effects of exposure to HPV. Consequently, the Church recognizes that the most effective way to avoid contracting the virus is for men and women to abstain from sexual relations before marriage and to remain faithful within marriage.

In light of these realities, we the Catholic Bishops of Texas call on the Governor to rescind his executive order and allow the public debate to go forward on this important healthcare issue.

#### *Approved by The Roman Catholic Bishops of Texas:*

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