

The Role of Oral Health Professionals in HPV Prevention Among AI/AN

Because human papillomavirus (HPV) is implicated in oropharyngeal cancers, the dental community is a possible pathway for increased HPV vaccine uptake. We reached out to Dr. Tim Ricks, the Deputy Director of the IHS Division of Oral Health, to ask some more questions about the role of oral health professionals in HPV prevention among AI/AN.

How does HPV relate to oral health?

Approximately 50,000 people in the U.S. will be diagnosed with oral cancer this year, 132 new people every day, and one person every hour of every day will die from oral cancer. In fact, the death rate from oral cancer is higher than cervical cancer, thyroid cancer, and even skin cancers like malignant melanoma. The most important contributing factor is tobacco use, but the fast-growing segment that are affected are young nonsmokers, and this is due to the HPV virus. HPV 16 is strongly associated with oropharyngeal cancers, which are the second most common type of HPV-associated cancer next to cervical cancer.

What can oral health professions do to promote HPV awareness and prevention?

In addition to STD Awareness month, April is also Oral Cancer Awareness Month. Because of the recent news regarding the increased incidence of oral cancer due to HPV infections, we want to highlight that connection between HPV and oral cancer. There are several things that oral health providers can do to promote awareness in patients and their parents regarding the link between HPV and oral cancer. First, we encourage oral health providers to conduct at least annual oral cancer clinical screenings on all patients, usually at the examination appointment; more than half of oral cancers are diagnosed at late stages, lessening the survival rate. Second, we encourage oral health providers to talk to their patients and their parents about HPV vaccination, beginning at age 9 up to age 26.

Where can oral health professionals find information and tools on HPV prevention to use in their workplace?

On April 4, 2018, the IHS Division of Oral Health sponsored a continuing dental education webinar on HPV and oral cancer, covering knowledge and attitudes of dental professionals, oral cancer facts and screening information, and how to talk to patients and parents about HPV vaccination. This webinar was recorded, and IHS, Tribal, and Urban dental program staff can access it by logging into the IHS Dental Portal at www.ihs.gov/doh, going to the Continuing Dental Education Catalog, and choosing course DE0144. One hour of CDE credit is available for listening to this recorded webinar. There are also some very good resources outside of the IHS such as [Team Maureen](#), the National HPV Roundtable [Action Guide](#), and the [Oral Cancer Foundation](#).

How is an interprofessional approach to HPV prevention valuable for oral health professionals who serve American Indians and Alaska Natives?

Oral health providers in IHS, tribal, and urban dental programs have a unique opportunity to interact daily with other health care professionals in their facility to meet the Agency's mission to "raise the physical, mental, social, and spiritual health of American Indians and Alaska Natives to the highest level." In 2000, the U.S. Surgeon General published the first Report on Oral Health, and the major message of that report is that "oral health is essential to the general health and well-being of all Americans." Numerous studies have pointed to the associations between oral health and systemic health, and it is imperative that oral health providers embrace the "whole body" concept of providing care in collaboration with non-oral health providers.

UPDATED SYPHILIS TREATMENT GUIDELINES

The CDC recently released an updated version of [Syphilis: A Provider's Guide to Treatment and Prevention](#).

This complement to [CDC's STD Treatment Guidelines](#) was created to help educate physicians and healthcare providers on the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of syphilis.

The updated guide contains images of typical and atypical primary and secondary syphilis symptoms and expands on information in the treatment guidelines to help address diagnostic challenges. It also includes need-to-know details about syphilis signs and symptoms by stage; the diagnosis of neurosyphilis, ocular syphilis, and congenital syphilis; information needed to diagnose and stage syphilis; syphilis prevention messages; and where to go for more information.