

# HPV vaccine polling

## Survey: Parents uncertain about immunizing kids

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Parents in the greater metropolitan area say they're aware of the HPV vaccine, which prevents cervical and several other cancers, but more than one-third responding in a newly released poll said they have no plans — or are unsure — whether they'll have their children immunized.

The HPV vaccine helps the body mount a vigorous response against multiple strains of the human papillomavirus, a sexually transmitted pathogen

that causes cervical cancer as well as several malignancies that affect men. The vaccine ideally is administered to girls and boys during preteen years, a factor that has raised questions among some parents.

In the Truth in Medicine Poll by South Nassau Communities Hospital, the large proportion of parents who voiced uncertainty about the vaccine — 37 percent — said they needed more information about the two-dose shot. They remarked being unaware the vaccine also was for boys.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends vaccination at age 11 or 12 for girls and boys. The vaccine was first recommended for girls in 2006, and for boys in 2011. The shot can be given later, up through age 45.

Although 60 percent of re-

spondents told pollsters they already had their children vaccinated against HPV, the percentage of parents expressing concerns meant there is a need for stronger communitywide education, medical experts at South Nassau said.

"The poll result I found to be most interesting is the one where parents didn't find the vaccine to be an imperative because it is not required for school," said Jeannine Gismondi, a cancer nurse and cervical cancer-prevention specialist at the Oceanside hospital.

There are two HPV vaccines, Gardasil and Cervarix, but only Gardasil, a product of Merck, is recommended for both boys and girls. Gardasil provides protection against HPV serotypes — strains — 16 and 18, the most common causes of cervical can-

cer. The vaccine also boosts immunity against HPV 6 and 11, the primary causes of genital warts. Cervarix, which has not been approved for boys, protects only against HPV 16 and 18.

"I am the mother of three boys who were vaccinated," Gismondi added. "I don't feel the education is out there for parents, especially in [medically] underserved communities."

The survey polled 600 respondents in November, and 57 percent of them were white. But large percentages also were black and Hispanic, survey data showed. Polling was conducted by LJR Custom Strategies.

Health care providers at South Nassau have turned to polling on a range of health issues because it serves as a barometer of public opinion. Poll results allow the hospital's experts to gauge

where public health education is most needed.

"There is controversy about the HPV vaccine," said Dr. Aaron Glatt, chairman of the department of medicine at South Nassau and a specialist in infectious diseases. "We try to pick topics where we will have an opportunity to correct misconceptions."

"HPV vaccination prevents infection with a virus that a young person may not be exposed to for 20 years. But the important thing is that this is a vaccine that can prevent cancer," Glatt added.

The vaccine also prevents head and neck cancers, as well as anal and penile cancers.

Dr. Warren Rosenfeld, chief of pediatrics at South Nassau, said, "This is a very safe vaccine. It has been around for a long time and tens of millions of doses have been given."

## Bellone battles with Kennedy over subpoena

BY RICK BRAND  
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Suffolk Democratic County Executive Steve Bellone is embroiled in a new battle with Republican Comptroller John Kennedy over his subpoena to get audit data on a proposed \$1.1 billion sports arena and convention center in Ronkonkoma.

County attorneys have moved to quash the comptroller's subpoena, and both sides are set to appear in state Supreme Court in Riverhead on Tuesday morning to argue the issue after appearing before Justice Joseph Pastorella on Friday.

Kennedy said he started a performance audit in October on the arena project, which is still in the planning stages, but the Bellone administration only provided his office with about 50 percent of the material sought, treating it as a freedom of information request.

Kennedy responded that the material was for an audit and when no more information was

forthcoming, he issued a subpoena last month to force production of the records.

"I think its reflective of a posture of trying to obstruct at any cost," Kennedy said. "They don't want anyone looking at what they are doing. They seem to be willing to go to any length to prevent scrutiny and oversight."

Jason Elan, Bellone's spokesman, accused Kennedy of "abusing the authority of his office by attempting to audit a process that has no fiscal impact on the county. If Mr. Kennedy wants to be involved in the RFQ [request for qualifications] process he should run for county executive."

The latest battle surfaced as Kennedy weighs whether to challenge Bellone, who is seeking his third term as county executive in November. Kennedy late last week said he expects to make a decision in 10 days. Bellone last year also gave \$44,000 to Democratic Southampton Supervisor Jay Schneiderman in a bid to unseat Kennedy, but he lost by a



Rendering of proposed Ronkonkoma arena. Suffolk County wants to quash the comptroller's subpoena.

narrow 3,700 votes.

Elan also criticized Kennedy's remarks made in the fall that labeled the process for the selection of a developer for Ronkonkoma project as "problematic." Elan called Kennedy's statement "totally unprofessional," saying it "shows he is more interested in grabbing a headline than doing a professional audit."

Last year, the Bellone administration appealed an earlier court ruling that upheld Kennedy's right to conduct an

audit during the process to replace beach concessionaire Beach Hut, which paid \$1.13 million in fines and penalties for shortchanging the county.

Kennedy said the Bellone aides are also dragging their feet in providing data on two other audits — one involving the Traffic and Parking Violations Agency and another reviewing capital project payments.

The Bellone administration in April chose a Chicago developer, Jones Lang LaSalle, as the master

developer for a project that would turn a 40-acre parking lot at the Ronkonkoma train station into a sprawling complex featuring a 17,500 arena, hotel and medical and research facilities.

The county legislature voted in June to give the developer eight months to assess the project's financial feasibility and deal with unanswered questions on traffic congestion, sewage issues and concern that the site might not be able to attract a major league hockey team.