

# Bill on vaccine causes debate

By Kirsten Singleton | *Morris News Service*

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COLUMBIA - No one's disputing the potential health benefits.

Studies show that a three-dose vaccination series of Gardasil is highly effective against four types of the sexually transmitted human papillomavirus, including the two types that cause 70 percent of cervical cancer, the Centers for Disease Control reported last June.

So the CDC recommended that the vaccine routinely be given to girls ages 11 to 12, and further recommended that females between the ages of 9 and 26 get the vaccine.

Rep. Joan Brady, R-Columbia, says protecting the state's girls from cervical cancer is a no-brainer.

"Why would you ever risk the possibility that they would be infected with this when you know you can absolutely get rid of that fear?" she asked.

Ms. Brady is sponsoring a bill that would require South Carolina's girls to be vaccinated from HPV by the start of seventh grade, beginning in the 2009-10 school year. That would be about 30,000 girls a year, at a cost to the state of \$1.7 million, according to the Department of Health and Environmental Control.

The money would cover the cost of vaccines for girls who don't have insurance to pay for the vaccine and those who don't meet the requirements of the Federal Vaccines for Children entitlement program.

Ms. Brady's legislation comes before the House this week, and its chances for passage are good: A majority of House members are co-sponsoring the bill. But a contingent of opponents is concerned about the precedent that's being set - requiring school vaccinations against a virus that's not contagious through everyday contact and taking health decisions out of parents' hands.

"We educate ... we take the information and we provide it," Rep. Shirley Hinson, R-Goose Creek, said. "And that's it. That's our role here."

Other concerns:

- Because the vaccine is so new, the long-term effects cannot be known.
- More study is needed concerning the effects of the vaccines on young girls.
- Females might skip their annual gynecological exams, figuring that they're protected by the HPV vaccine.

An estimated 200 new cervical cancer cases are diagnosed each year in South Carolina, resulting in 60 to 70 deaths.

Not all are related to HPV.

Audience members at a Capital City Republican Women debate Tuesday questioned whether the state should require all girls to get a vaccination in hopes of preventing such a small number of cervical cancer cases.

Ms. Brady's theory is that the real opposition stems from the fact that HPV is sexually transmitted. But she believes the vaccination mandate dovetails nicely with the message of abstinence.

The addition of an amendment allowing parents to opt out by filling out a form should ease parental-rights concerns, she said.

Palmetto Family Council President Oran Smith believes South Carolina should stick with a recommendation, not a mandate.

"I just think any kind of a drug that you're injecting into a child, the parents need to have a say in," Mr. Smith said.

Ms. Brady said the Department of Health and Environmental Control already can require the HPV vaccine, via regulation - and has pledged to do so.

DHEC estimates that, without a requirement, 25 percent will get the vaccine. With a mandate, 95 percent will receive it.

Ms. Brady said that under DHEC regulations, parents wouldn't have an opt out.

"I just don't think it's good public policy to use an agency's authority as a club," Mr. Smith said.

South Carolina isn't the only state considering the issue. Virginia, Florida and New Mexico lawmakers are among those pursuing mandated HPV vaccinations.

Texas Gov. Rick Perry issued an executive order in February requiring the vaccine for girls starting in sixth grade, but the Legislature is debating a bill that would bar state health officials from following the order.

A Missouri lawmaker is proposing requiring insurance companies to pay for the vaccination.

**Reach Kirsten Singleton at (803) 414-6611 or [kirsten.singleton@morris.com](mailto:kirsten.singleton@morris.com).**

### **KEY CONTACTS**

- Rep. Joan Brady, R-Columbia: (803) 734-3027, [BradyJ@schouse.org](mailto:BradyJ@schouse.org)

- Rep. Shirley Hinson, R-Goose Creek: (803) 734-2951, [HinsonS@schouse.org](mailto:HinsonS@schouse.org)

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