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## WOMAN UP FDA Recommends HPV Vaccine for Males

On Wednesday the Food and Drug Administration's advisory council recommended approval of Gardasil — the vaccine against cervical cancer and genital warts — for males, as well as females. Bloomberg reports that the final vote came in at 7-0 for the vaccine's approval.

When the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine was pending approval for girls, it came under fire by critics who insisted it would promote promiscuity. This time around — whether because male promiscuity just doesn't raise the same red flags or because the controversy on the subject has already been exhausted — that argument doesn't seem to be making the rounds with the same vigor. Instead, the question now seems to center on how likely males are to get the vaccine, when HPV is still largely seen as a female problem.

Merck, the pharmaceutical company that manufactures Gardasil, is seeking approval from the FDA to use the vaccine to protect against genital warts in males. There is, however, a second rationale behind approving the drug for boys and men: vaccinating males against HPV will decrease the number of girls and women who contract cervical cancer. There is a question, though, as to whether that will increase the number of males likely to get

vaccinated. A study this summer by Florida State University found that the knowledge that the vaccine would put their female partners at less risk for cervical cancer neither increased nor decreased men's interest in getting the vaccine. HPV can also cause cancer in men, but it's much rarer than in women — furthering the perception that it's primarily a women's issue.

Whether males are interested in the vaccine isn't the only question. In June, researchers from Harvard said that vaccinating males to protect females against HPV simply wasn't cost-effective; instead, they said that doctors should concentrate on getting the expensive vaccine to girls and women not yet covered. That's easier said than done, though. The vaccine is not mandatory for girls, and with the lingering controversy over the vaccine, it's unlikely to become so anytime soon. Even with the recommended approval for males, whether they will turn out in large numbers to get the vaccine remains to be seen.

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