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State to distribute cervical cancer vaccine to Alaska clinics

High cost of Gardasil forces change to state's vaccine policy

(Juneau, Alaska) — Early this summer, the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services will begin distributing more than 20,000 doses of Gardasil[®], the first vaccine to prevent cervical cancer, to public and private clinics statewide.

The state will pay Gardasil's cost only for girls age 9 through 18 who are eligible for the Vaccines for Children's program. The state intends to continue providing all other vaccines currently recommended for children at no charge.

“Although the high cost of Gardasil limits our ability to provide it for all Alaska women, we're pleased that the department will be able to offer this vaccine for many Alaska girls who otherwise might not be able to obtain it,” said Laurel Wood, state immunization program manager.

For more than 30 years, the state has covered the cost of all recommended vaccines for children. Now state health officials are changing the policy for Gardasil only, saying federal funding sources for vaccines have not kept pace with the skyrocketing costs of immunizing children.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration approved Gardasil in June 2006 for use in girls and women age 9 to 26. Gardasil prevents infection from certain types of human papillomavirus (HPV), a sexually transmitted virus that can cause cervical cancer and genital warts. The American Cancer Society estimates that more than 11,000 U.S. women will develop invasive cervical cancer this year, and about 3,700 will die of the disease.

For more information about the HPV vaccine, visit
www.epi.hss.state.ak.us/bulletins/docs/b2007_11.pdf.