If there were a vaccine against cancer, would you get it for your kids?

For many decades, children have routinely received vaccinations against the so-called “childhood diseases” such as measles, mumps and rubella. In 2006 a new vaccine was introduced into pediatricians’ offices.

The HPV vaccine was developed to protect against many strains of the human papilloma virus (HPV) that can be the cause of several types of oral and genital cancers.

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) recommends the HPV vaccination for boys and girls at the ages of 11 or 12. Preteens have a higher immune response to the vaccine than older teens, and the risk of exposure to HPV increases after the age of 13.

While it is recommended that these vaccinations be given to preteens, as they are most effective when administered before a person becomes sexually active, boys and men can receive an HPV vaccination up until the age of 21. Women can be vaccinated up until the age of 26.

Some have concerns about the HPV vaccine, primarily because it has only been available the last nine years. Numerous studies have been completed on its safety, and the CDC has reiterated that it considers it to be safe. If you have concerns about the vaccine, make an appointment to talk with your doctor. He or she can explain the reasons for HPV vaccination and address your concerns.

Some health care experts have also noted that the vaccination requires multiple office visits. Since most healthy preteens don’t make multiple office visits within a year, getting an HPV vaccination may seem like a hassle – but the benefits far outweigh any inconvenience.

Today there IS a vaccine against certain cancers, and it is available to your kids right now. Assure them a healthier future. Protect them with the HPV vaccination.

Dear God: We thank you for the gifts of science and medical care. Keep us mindful of them as we strive to use them for ourselves, families and neighbors. Amen.

Resources: Advocatehealth.com • Centers for Disease Control: cdc.gov/hpv/vaccine.html • American Cancer Society: cancer.org/cancer/cervicalcancer

Adults need vaccines, too.

While “a case of the flu” may not sound too serious, thousands of people die each year of the flu in the United States. Less severe cases of the flu still cause a great deal of discomfort, as well as causing people to take time off school or work. This is why the Centers for Disease Control advises that children over the age of six months and adults receive an annual flu vaccine.

While the vaccine does not provide complete protection against all varieties of flu, if you are infected, the vaccine can lessen the effects of the illness. In fact, individuals who receive the vaccine are 60% less likely to require professional medical care even if they do catch the flu bug.

Incidentally, if you’ve been afraid to get a flu vaccine because you don’t like needles, you are in luck! It’s now possible to receive the flu vaccine via nasal spray!

The Centers for Disease Control advises people to get their flu vaccines before October. Why? Because the full effects of the vaccine don’t kick in until two weeks after administration. This leaves a window of opportunity open for infection, and the risk is greater during winter, peak flu season. However, flu vaccines are often available even in late winter for those who didn’t get them in the fall.

Since August is National Immunization Month, this can be a great time to discuss getting a flu shot with your friends and loved ones. Since 90% of flu fatalities during regular flu season are among people 65 and older, a conversation about the value of flu shots is particularly important for the elderly. If you can, offer rides to seniors and shut-ins who need to get to a doctor’s office or clinic for their immunizations.

The CDC recommends these healthy practices to help prevent the flu:

✦ Wash hands regularly and disinfect household and office surfaces.
✦ Avoid contact with people who have the flu. Similarly, if you have the flu, stay home until your fever has been gone for 24 hours.
✦ Keep your hands away from your nose, mouth and eyes.

Resources: Advocatehealth.com • U.S. Department of Health and Human Services: flu.gov and vaccines.gov • Centers for Disease Control: cdc.gov/flu