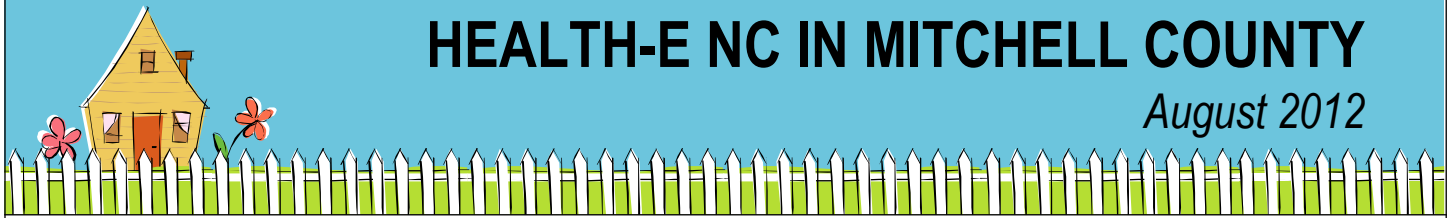


HEALTH-E NC IN MITCHELL COUNTY

August 2012



TEXT MESSAGING AND TELEMEDICINE TO PROMOTE ADOLESCENT VACCINATION IN NORTH CAROLINA

Parents, teachers, students and staff at two middle schools in Mitchell County are part of a project exploring the use of text messaging and telemedicine to promote adolescent vaccination. Text message reminders can be a good way of helping people get the health care they need. Our team explored using cell phones and text messages to reach adolescents and their parents about the importance of getting adolescent vaccines including the HPV vaccine.

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a virus that can be spread by any type of sexual activity. HPV infection can cause genital warts and cancers in males and females. A vaccine is available for males and females to prevent genital warts, and anal, cervical and vaginal cancers. The project is funded by the University Cancer Research Fund at UNC-Chapel Hill.

HOW THE PROJECT WORKED

We wanted to find out if adolescents would learn about HPV (human papillomavirus) and HPV vaccination through text messages and telemedicine. Parents gave permission for their children to participate in surveys and group discussions about the use of text messages in school settings from November 2011 through April 2012. Parents, teachers and administrators were also interviewed.

WHAT WE LEARNED FROM STUDENTS

- **Students use their cell phones most for texting, but most have not received text messages about health information:** Students want to get text messages about HPV and HPV vaccine, but primarily from medical professionals.
- **Students learned a great deal about HPV and HPV vaccine:** At the beginning of the project, only three students (7%) said they had heard of HPV and four students (10%) had heard of HPV vaccine. By the end of the project, 87% said they had heard of both.
- **The number of students who got the HPV vaccine did not increase very much:** However, students did increase their understanding of the benefits of getting the vaccine.
- **Students were slightly more comfortable with getting the vaccine at their school-based health center at the end of the project.**
- **Students liked messages that were informative and allowed them to make their own decision about whether to get vaccinated (“HPV is a sexually transmitted infection. But there is a vaccine you can get to prevent it!”):** When asked to cut-and-paste their own messages from a list of statements, students mostly chose statements that were informative about the vaccine (e.g., “HPV is an infection you can get from having sex.”)
- **Teens preferred talking with their parents or with their doctors about the HPV vaccine more than any other sources.**



WHAT WE LEARNED FROM SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND PARENTS:

- **Text messaging students about the vaccine may or may not be a good idea if parents were not involved or did not approve:** Most parents and administrators did not know the HPV vaccine was now available and recommended for both girls and boys.
- **One teacher said she felt text messaging the students about the vaccine could be a good idea because most students communicated using their cell phones:** However, both teachers said it would be very important to get parental permission first, especially since the vaccine is associated with sexual activity.
- **Teachers and administrators believe that parents do not use the school-based health center because they do not know about it or do not know how to use it:** However, parents said they did know of the program but that their children were getting healthcare elsewhere. Only one of the three parents said she would *not* be comfortable with her child getting the HPV vaccine in the school-based health center.

NEXT STEPS

We are sharing these findings with parents and community leaders in Mitchell County to explore the possibility of using text messaging to parents and middle school children to inform them about recommended routine adolescent vaccines and other health issues important to them. Consider vaccinating your teen with all routinely recommended vaccines against Tetanus/Pertussis (whooping cough), HPV, Meningococcal disease, and Influenza. Possible locations for vaccination include your doctor's office, the Health Department, and your local School Based Health Center.

TELL US WHAT YOU THINK

We are really interested in knowing your thoughts about the project! Please send Chassidy Hanley an email or call her to let us know what you think: chassidyhanley@unc.edu; (919) 843-3237. Thank you.

A Special Thanks to:

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Reference: North S, Ortiz RR, Cates, JR, MacHardy J, Martin A, Smith R, King D, Coyne-Beasley T. U need 2 know about this: Texting to prevent HPV. North American Primary Care Research Group, 2012 Primary Care Practice Based Research Network Conference. Boston, MA. June 22, 2012