



**Public Advocate for the City of New York**

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# **A Better Shot at Prevention: HPV Vaccine More Available at City Health Clinics**

**A REPORT BY PUBLIC ADVOCATE BETSY GOTBAUM  
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# Office of the New York City Public Advocate

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Genital human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the United States. More than 10,000 women in this country develop cervical cancer each year as a result of HPV infection. In June 2006, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended that all girls ages 11 and 12 receive Gardasil, a HPV vaccine. The vaccine protects against the four HPV strains that are responsible for 70 percent of cervical cancer cases.

In March 2007, the New York City Office of the Public Advocate released a report assessing the availability of the HPV vaccine at city health clinics. This report found that approximately half of city health clinics failed to provide access to the HPV vaccine. This report assesses changes since March 2007 and updates information from the earlier report.

In June 2008, investigators called the 10 Department of Mental Health and Hygiene (DOHMH) STD clinics, five DOHMH immunization walk-in clinics, and 64 Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC) child and teen health clinics on weekdays between 9:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. Investigators inquired as to the availability and cost of the HPV vaccine for an uninsured 12-year-old girl at each clinic.

## **FINDINGS**

Comparing the 2007 and 2008 data, the Office of the Public Advocate found that while the availability of the HPV vaccine at HHC child and teen health clinics and DOHMH immunization walk-in clinics has increased, the cost for the uninsured still varies widely. The vaccine is still unavailable at DOHMH STD clinics.

- Eighty percent (4 of 5) of DOHMH immunization walk-in clinics now offer the HPV vaccine for free, up from 0 of 5 in 2007. STD clinics still do not offer the vaccine.
- Approximately 90 percent (57 of 64) of the HHC child and teen health clinics now offer the HPV vaccine, up from 35 of 67 in 2007.
- For the uninsured, out-of-pocket costs for the HPV vaccine vary widely among HHC child and teen health clinics, at one clinic the cost is \$600.
- HPV immunization services are not available at all DOHMH immunization clinics and are not available every business day.
- Many HHC child and teen health clinics are difficult to reach by telephone, over a third of clinics needed to be called multiple times in order to reach a staff member.
- The DOHMH website and 311 now provide information on the HPV vaccine and where to obtain it.
- The Citywide Immunization Registry now monitors HPV vaccinations.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Offer the HPV vaccine at STD walk-in clinics and at all HHC child and teen health clinics.
- The immunization clinic at the Corona Health Center should expand services to include children.
- The DOHMH should expand immunization services in Staten Island.
- Train all applicable HHC clinic staff so that they are knowledgeable about the circumstances in which a child is eligible for state health insurance and/or to receive the HPV vaccine for free or at little cost through the Vaccines For Children (VFC) program.
- Ensure that staff is available to answer calls during clinic hours.
- Ensure that immunization services at DOHMH immunization clinics are available every business day.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Genital human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Thousands of women in this country develop cervical cancer each year as a result of HPV infection. In June 2006, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommended that all girls ages 11 and 12 receive Gardasil, a HPV vaccine, and that girls and women ages 13 to 26 be given a "catch-up"<sup>2</sup> vaccination.<sup>3</sup> The HPV vaccine protects against the four HPV strains that are responsible for 70 percent of cervical cancer cases and 90 percent of genital warts cases.<sup>4</sup>

While private insurance covers the cost of the HPV vaccine for most insured children, the uninsured may find accessing this potentially life-saving vaccine difficult. The cost of the HPV vaccine—\$360 for three doses<sup>5</sup>—is prohibitive for most low-income families, making publicly-funded programs critical if low-income girls and women are to receive this protection. This report finds that the city has taken steps to ensure that the HPV vaccine is more available at New York City health clinics.

Pursuant to the New York City Charter, the Public Advocate is charged with reviewing the programs, operations, and activities of city agencies.<sup>6</sup> In accordance with this responsibility, the Office of the Public Advocate released a report in March 2007 to: 1) assess the quality of the information provided by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) and 311<sup>7</sup> about the HPV vaccine and where to obtain it, and 2) determine whether the HPV vaccine is available at DOHMH's immunization and STD walk-in clinics and at the Health and Hospitals Corporation's (HHC) child and teen health clinics, and at what cost, if any. This report assesses changes in the provision and cost of the HPV vaccine since March 2007 and updates information from the earlier report.

## **BACKGROUND**

HHC is a public benefit corporation created by New York State that oversees public health care in the five boroughs.<sup>8</sup> HHC operates 64 child and teen health clinics that offer preventative health care services, including immunizations, for children from birth to age 21, with nine clinics in Queens, 11 in the Bronx, 24 in Brooklyn, 18 in Manhattan, and two in Staten Island.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Centers for Disease Control Fact Sheet, *Genital HPV*, December 2007. [www.cdc.gov/std/HPV/STDFact-HPV.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/std/HPV/STDFact-HPV.htm).

<sup>2</sup> A "catch-up" vaccination is administered some time after the recommended age range for the vaccine. CDC *Recommended immunization schedules for person aged 0-18 years—United States, 2008*.

<sup>3</sup> CDC, Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, *Provisional Recommendations for the Use of Quadrivalent HPV Vaccine*, June 29, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Steinbrook R., "The Potential of Human Papillomavirus Vaccines," *New England Journal of Medicine*, 354: 1109-1112, March 16, 2006.

<sup>5</sup> Chesson, Harrell W., et al, "Cost-effectiveness of Human Papillomavirus Vaccination in the United States," *CDC Emerging Infectious Diseases*, February 2008.

<sup>6</sup> NYC Charter Section 24.

<sup>7</sup> 311 is New York City's telephone number for government information and non-emergency services.

<sup>8</sup> Health and Hospitals Corporation (HHC), "About HHC," <http://www.nyc.gov/html/hhc/html/about/about.shtml>.

<sup>9</sup> HHC, "Child and Teen Health Clinics." <http://home2.nyc.gov/html/hhc/html/community/childhealth.shtml>.

DOHMH operates ten STD clinics in New York City that provide free STD screening and treatment and offer vaccines for Hepatitis A and B.<sup>10</sup> There are two clinics in Queens, one in the Bronx, two in Brooklyn, four in Manhattan, and one in Staten Island. DOHMH also operates five immunization clinics that provide free immunizations, including the HPV vaccine, for both children and adults.<sup>11</sup> There are two immunization clinics in Brooklyn and one clinic each in Manhattan, Queens and the Bronx. At the time of this report, there was no clinic in Staten Island.

The CDC estimates that approximately 20 million people have HPV (almost 6.2 million Americans are infected each year) and at least 50 percent of sexually active women and men are infected with HPV at some point in their lives.<sup>12</sup>

There are more than 40 strains of HPV that affect the genital area and are spread primarily through sexual contact.<sup>13</sup> Individuals infected with HPV often are unaware they are infected because there are generally no signs or symptoms.<sup>14</sup> Although some infected individuals have visible genital warts or develop pre-cancerous tissue in the cervix, vulva, anus, or penis, HPV infection can be spread with or without any apparent signs.<sup>15</sup>

There is no cure for HPV infection, but for 90 percent of infected individuals, the infection clears on its own within two years.<sup>16</sup> But for thousands of women annually, HPV causes cervical cancer.<sup>17</sup> The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2008, more than 11,070 new cases of cervical cancer will be diagnosed in the United States and more than 3,870 women will die from this disease.<sup>18</sup> In New York City, from 2001 to 2005, there were 473 average annual cervical cancer cases and 142 average annual deaths from cervical cancer.<sup>19</sup>

According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, a non-profit organization focusing on health care issues, Hispanic and African American women are approximately 1.5 times more likely to be diagnosed with cervical cancer than Caucasian women and are more likely than their white peers to die from this disease.<sup>20</sup> In New York City, minority women are less likely to obtain a cervical cancer screening (Pap test),<sup>21</sup> decreasing their chances of detecting the disease in its earliest, most curable stages. For example, in a 2006 DOHMH Community Health Survey, 33 percent of

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<sup>10</sup> New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), "Free and Confidential Clinics," <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/std/std2.shtml>. The Queens Rockaway STD clinic is operated by the *Joseph P. Addabbo Health Center* and not DOHMH.

<sup>11</sup> DOHMH, "Immunization Walk-In Clinics," <http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/imm/immclin.shtml>

<sup>12</sup> See 1.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, *HPV Vaccine: Implementation and Financing Policy*, February 2008.

<sup>18</sup> American Cancer Society, *Detailed Guide: Cervical Cancer*, March 26, 2008.

<sup>19</sup> New York State Department of Health, New York State Cancer Registry, June 2008, [www.health.state.ny.us/statistics/cancer/registry/vol1/v1rny.htm](http://www.health.state.ny.us/statistics/cancer/registry/vol1/v1rny.htm).

<sup>20</sup> See 17.

<sup>21</sup> A Pap test detects pre-cancerous and cancerous cells in the cervix. Regular Pap tests are needed for early detection of cervical cancer. In the United States, where use of the Pap test is regular and widespread, the number of women diagnosed with cervical cancer is relatively small compared to countries where regular Pap tests are less common.

Asian women stated that they had not obtained a Pap test in the last three years compared to 20 percent of white women.<sup>22</sup> In a 2004 study published by the Family Planning Perspectives Journal, researchers estimated that in 2000 treatment costs associated with HPV totaled nearly three billion dollars.<sup>23</sup>

In June 2006, the Food and Drug Administration licensed Gardasil,<sup>24</sup> the HPV vaccine for girls and women between the ages 9 and 26.<sup>25</sup> That same month, the CDC's ACIP recommended that all girls ages 11 and 12 receive the HPV vaccine, and girls and women ages 13 to 26 be given a "catch-up" vaccination.<sup>26</sup> The HPV vaccine protects against four HPV strains (6, 11, 16, and 18), which are responsible for 70 percent of cervical cancer cases and 90 percent of genital warts cases.<sup>27</sup>

The ACIP's 2008 recommended immunization schedule recommends girls ages 11 and 12 years be given the HPV vaccine.<sup>28</sup> For entrance into New York City schools, there is currently no requirement that girls obtain the HPV vaccine.

According to Women in Government, a non-profit group concerned with women's issues and policy, as of June 17, 2008, lawmakers in 27 states and the District of Columbia have introduced measures that would specifically require girls ages 11 and 12<sup>29</sup> to obtain the HPV vaccine before entering school.<sup>30</sup> The New York State Assembly's version of the bill was referred to Health Committee in January 2008.<sup>31</sup> All of the mandatory HPV vaccination bills allow parents to "opt out" of the requirement for medical, moral, and/or religious reasons.

The ACIP also recommended that the HPV vaccine be included in Vaccines for Children (VFC), a federally funded program that provides free vaccines for children age 18 or younger who are either: enrolled in Medicaid,<sup>32</sup> uninsured or underinsured,<sup>33</sup> or are Alaska Native or American

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<sup>22</sup> DOHMH, EpiQuery, 2006 Community Health Survey.

<sup>23</sup> See 17.

<sup>24</sup> Gardasil is produced by Merck. Another HPV vaccine, Cervarix, produced by GlaxoSmithKline, is expected to be approved in 2008.

<sup>25</sup> U.S. Food and Drug Administration, *Product Approval Information—Licensing Action, Gardasil Questions and Answers*, June 8, 2006, [www.fda.gov/cber/products/hpvmr060806qa.htm](http://www.fda.gov/cber/products/hpvmr060806qa.htm).

<sup>26</sup> See 3.

<sup>27</sup> See 4.

<sup>28</sup> See 2.

<sup>29</sup> Girls ages 11 and 12 are usually entering the sixth or seventh grade.

<sup>30</sup> As of June 17, 2008, the following states have introduced bills that would require mandatory HPV vaccination: Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. Only Virginia and DC (awaiting Congressional approval) have passed the vaccine requirement. *Women in Government Challenge to Eliminate Cervical Cancer Campaign State Activity*, June 17, 2008.

[www.womeningovernment.org/files/file/prevention/toolkit/Large-Activity-Map-6-17-2008.pdf](http://www.womeningovernment.org/files/file/prevention/toolkit/Large-Activity-Map-6-17-2008.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> New York State Assembly Bill Summary A05810, July 15, 2008, <http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?bn=a5810>.

<sup>32</sup> A child may enroll in Medicaid just prior to receiving healthcare services at a provider's office/clinic, if the clinic provides enrollment assistance.

<sup>33</sup> Underinsured children are those whose health insurance benefit plan does not include vaccinations. These children are eligible to receive VFC vaccines only if they are served by a Federally Qualified Health Center (a center that provides health care to a medically underserved population) or a rural health clinic.

Indian. VFC gives health care providers free vaccines, and the parents/legal guardians of eligible patients only have to pay a small administrative fee, at the discretion of the provider.<sup>34</sup>

The HPV vaccine itself costs \$360 for three doses at \$120 per dose.<sup>35</sup> Once a vaccine is recommended by the ACIP, however, insurance providers generally cover the vaccination's costs. Ninety-five health insurers, covering approximately 94 percent of privately insured individuals in the United States, cover the HPV vaccine.<sup>36</sup> For New York City employees, all 14 insurance companies from which an employee can choose cover the HPV vaccine.<sup>37</sup> Medicaid<sup>38</sup> will also cover the costs of the HPV vaccine for those enrolled, and those who are uninsured may be eligible to receive the HPV vaccine through the VFC program.

### **PREVIOUS REPORT BY THE PUBLIC ADVOCATE ON ACCESS TO HPV VACCINE**

This report is a follow-up to the March 2007 report, *No Shot at Prevention: HPV Vaccine Unavailable at Many City Health Clinics*. Findings of that report included:

- Neither the DOHMH website nor 311 provided any information on where to obtain the HPV vaccine in New York City.
- DOHMH immunization and STD walk-in clinics did not offer the HPV vaccine.
- Approximately half of the HHC child and teen health clinics offered the HPV vaccine.
- For the uninsured, out-of-pocket costs for the vaccine varied widely among HHC clinics.

Testimony given by the DOHMH Commissioner Dr. Thomas Frieden at a City Council hearing in March 2007 following the release of the Public Advocate's initial report indicated that STD clinics would not offer the vaccine because they have a low success rate in administering vaccines that require more than one dose.<sup>39</sup> At the same hearing, Commissioner Frieden stated that immunization walk-in clinics would offer the HPV vaccine beginning June 2007.<sup>40</sup>

In response to the Public Advocate's initial report, a March 2007 HHC press release asserted that all HHC hospitals and community-based health centers had been offering the vaccine since November 2006. The statement also noted that HHC would conduct additional staff training to address the inconsistent information provided when callers inquire about the availability of the HPV vaccine.<sup>41</sup> At a City Council hearing in March 2007, HHC Executive Vice President and

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<sup>34</sup> For New York, the maximum administrative fee a provider may charge for a vaccine is \$17.85. Federal Register, October 3, 1994, [www.cdc.gov/nip/vfc/Parent/fee\\_fedreg.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nip/vfc/Parent/fee_fedreg.htm).

<sup>35</sup> See 5.

<sup>36</sup> Merck, *Merck's Cervical Cancer Vaccine, Gardasil, Added to the CDC Vaccines For Children Contract*, November 1, 2006, [www.merck.com/newsroom/press\\_releases/product/2006\\_1101.html](http://www.merck.com/newsroom/press_releases/product/2006_1101.html).

<sup>37</sup> Telephone calls were made on February 7, 2007 to all 14 insurance companies offered to employees of the City of New York. Representatives of each company were asked whether the company covers the HPV vaccine. Six companies covered the vaccine for girls and women between the ages 9 and 30; five companies covered the vaccine for girls and women between the ages of 9 and 26; one company covered the vaccine for girls and women between the ages 12 and 26; and 2 companies had no age restrictions.

<sup>38</sup> In New York, children's Medicaid is known as Child Health Plus A.

<sup>39</sup> Testimony of New York City DOHMH Commissioner Thomas R. Frieden, M.D. before the New York City Council Committee on Health regarding FY2008 Preliminary Budget, March 12, 2007.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> HHC Press Release, "Statement in Response to the NYC Public Advocate Report Regarding Access to HPV Vaccine," March 7, 2007, <http://home2.nyc.gov/html/hhc/html/pressroom/press-release-20070307.shtml>.

Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ramanathan Raju testified that since November 2006, HHC had order more than 10,000 does of the HPV vaccine from the VFC program.<sup>42</sup> In addition, Dr. Raju stated that nearly 95 percent of HHC child patients were eligible to receive a free HPV vaccine and that HHC staff would assist eligible patients enroll in state health insurance programs.<sup>43</sup>

## **METHODOLOGY**

In June 2008, calls were made to DOHMH’s five immunization walk-in clinics<sup>44</sup> and ten STD walk-in clinics<sup>45</sup> (see Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively) and to 64 HHC child and teen health clinics (see Appendix C)<sup>46</sup> to determine whether the HPV vaccine was available and at what cost, if any, for an uninsured 12-year-old girl.<sup>47</sup> All calls were placed between the hours of 9:30 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. on weekdays. Each clinic was called at least once; some clinics were called several times in an attempt to reach a staff member. Investigators also examined the DOHMH website and called 311 to assess the quality of HPV vaccine information available.

## **FINDINGS**

Comparing the 2007 and 2008 data, the Office of the Public Advocate found that while the availability of the HPV vaccine at HHC child and teen health clinics and DOHMH immunization walk-in clinics has increased, the cost for the uninsured still varies widely at HHC clinics. The vaccine is still unavailable at DOHMH STD clinics.

<b>HHC Child and Teen Health Clinics</b>			
	<b>2007 Report</b>	<b>2008 Report</b>	<b>Change '07-'08</b>
<b>HPV vaccine offered</b>	35 of 67	57 of 64	36.8% Increase
<b>If no insurance:</b>			
<b>Vaccine is free/staff will help parent obtain insurance for child</b>	17 of 35	19 of 57	(15.3%) Decrease
<b>Sliding scale cost/staff will help parent obtain insurance</b>	8 of 35	9 of 57	(7.0%) Decrease
<b>Will charge for vaccine and/or office visit</b>	7 of 35	4 of 57	(13.0%) Decrease
<b>Unknown</b>	N/A	13 of 57	N/A
<b>Must register as patient</b>	N/A	11 of 57	N/A
<b>Referred to DOHMH immunization clinic</b>	N/A	1 of 57	N/A

<sup>42</sup> Testimony of HHC Executive Vice President and Chief Medical Officer Dr. Ramanathan Raju before the New York City Council Committees on Health and Women’s Issues regarding cervical cancer screening and prevention, March 29, 2007.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> The 2007 report examined an immunization clinic in Staten Island. In the time period covered by the 2008 report, the Staten Island clinic was no longer open and a new immunization clinic, the Fort Greene Health Center, had been opened.

<sup>45</sup> The 2007 report included a STD clinic in Queens Rockaway. This clinic is not operated by the DOHMH. See 10.

<sup>46</sup> The previous report examined 67 HHC child health centers; however, the HHC website now only lists 64 clinics. The three clinics no longer listed are the Bronx River Family Health Center, Charles R. Drew Primary Care Center in Queens, and Flatbush Avenue Health Center in Brooklyn.

<sup>47</sup> Ideally, all vaccines should be administered in a patient’s primary health care home, but city health clinics, including immunization walk-in clinics, STD walk-in clinics, and child and teen health clinics are appropriate settings for obtaining the HPV vaccine. CDC, *Parents and VFC*, [www.cdc.gov/nip/vfc/Parent/parent\\_home.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/nip/vfc/Parent/parent_home.htm).

<b>DOHMH Immunization walk-in clinics</b>			
	<b>2007 Report</b>	<b>2008 Report</b>	<b>Change '07-'08</b>
<b>HPV vaccine offered</b>	0 of 5	4 of 5	80% Increase
<b>Free</b>	N/A	4 of 5	N/A

<b>DOHMH STD walk-in clinics</b>			
	<b>2007 Report</b>	<b>2008 Report</b>	<b>Change '07-'08</b>
<b>HPV vaccine offered</b>	0 of 10	0 of 10	No Change
<b>Free</b>	N/A	N/A	N/A

**Eighty percent of DOHMH immunization walk-in clinics now offer the HPV vaccine for free.**

The DOHMH runs five immunization walk-in clinics, one each in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Queens, and two in Brooklyn. There is no longer a clinic in Staten Island.<sup>48</sup> Four of the clinics offer vaccines for adults and for children ages four and older, while one clinic, Corona Health Center, only serves adults (See Appendix A). The percentage of DOHMH immunization walk-in clinics that offer the HPV vaccine for free has increased 80 percent since 2007 when none of the clinics offered the vaccine.

**STD walk-in clinics still do not offer the HPV vaccine.**

At five clinics, a staff member could not be reached. Calls to the remaining five STD walk-in clinics revealed that none of these clinics offer the HPV vaccine, which confirms Commissioner Frieden’s March 2007 testimony stating that STD clinics would not offer the vaccine. This finding remains unchanged from the 2007 report.

**Approximately 90 percent of the HHC child and teen health clinics now offer the HPV vaccine.**

Of the 64 child and teen health clinics, 57 clinics (90 percent) indicated that they offer the HPV vaccine. Of the remaining seven clinics, two clinics did not offer the vaccine,<sup>49</sup> three clinics did not answer whether the vaccine was available,<sup>50</sup> one clinic was unreachable,<sup>51</sup> and one clinic was closed for renovation.<sup>52</sup>

According to HHC, all HHC child and teen health clinics have offered the HPV vaccine as of November 2006 and additional training would be provided to ensure staff members were aware of this.<sup>53</sup> However, staff members who answered phones at approximately one-third (22 of 64) of clinics did not know whether the vaccine was available, making it necessary to transfer callers

<sup>48</sup> In the March 2007 report, Staten Island had a clinic that served adults only. According to DOHMH, this clinic will reopen in October 2008 and remain open until December 2008.

<sup>49</sup> Bushwick Communicare and Bellevue Hospital Center stated they do not offer the HPV vaccine.

<sup>50</sup> Washington Heights Child Care Center, Kings County Hospital Center, and Lafayette Houses Child Health Clinic did not answer whether the vaccine was available. Staff members stated a child would need to be a registered patient before a doctor would determine what vaccines were necessary, did not know whether the vaccine was offered, and referred the investigator to an immunization clinic, respectively.

<sup>51</sup> Brevoort Houses Child Health Clinic was unreachable by telephone. In this report, this clinic has been counted as not offering the HPV vaccine because a prospective patient would be unable to reach it for services.

<sup>52</sup> The Crown Heights Child Health Clinic is closed for renovation.

<sup>53</sup> See 41.

multiple times to locate a person who did know the answer. The percentage of HHC child and teen health clinics offering the HPV vaccine increased approximately 40 percent since 2007.

**For the uninsured, out-of-pocket costs for the HPV vaccine still vary widely among HHC child and teen health clinics.**

Of the 57 clinics that offered the HPV vaccine, only 19 clinics stated that there would be no out-of-pocket costs and that the clinic could help the parent obtain state health insurance for the child. Nine clinics stated that the clinic could help the parent obtain state health insurance for the child and/or a sliding scale cost would be assessed. Thirteen clinics stated there would be some sort of fee but did not indicate a specific amount. One clinic stated the total cost would be approximately \$600. (Please see Appendix C for the names of these clinics.) This finding is unchanged since 2007 when the Office of the Public Advocate also found that the out-of-pocket costs for the uninsured varied widely at HHC child and teen health clinics.

**HPV immunization services are not available at all DOHMH immunization clinics and are not available every business day.**

Four of five immunization walk-in clinics do not provide the HPV vaccine every business day. For example, Homecrest Health Center of Brooklyn only provides vaccines on Wednesdays. Only the Fort Green Health Center Immunization Clinic of Brooklyn is open Monday through Friday. The Corona Health Center only serves adults and the immunization center in Staten Island is only open from October to December 2008 and will only serve adults.

**Many HHC child and teen health clinics are difficult to reach by telephone, over a third of clinics needed to be called multiple times in order to reach a staff member.**

Investigators needed to call approximately 34 percent (22 of 64) of HHC clinics multiple times in order to reach a staff member. The Woodhull Medical and Mental Health Clinic in Brooklyn was called four times because the investigator was disconnected twice after being put on hold, then informed by an automated system that the call could not be completed, and finally, the investigator waited on hold for nearly eight minutes before reaching a nurse who could answer whether the clinic offered the vaccine. Brevoort Houses Child Health Clinic in Brooklyn was unreachable during the previous report's investigation with investigators reaching a full voicemail box and, in 2008, was still unreachable with investigators reaching a recorded message stating, "Please try again later, good-bye."

**The DOHMH website and 311 now provide information on the HPV vaccine and where to obtain it.**

The DOHMH website provides information on HPV and the HPV vaccine in the Health Topics A-Z, Women's Health, and Bureau of Immunization sections of its website and provides a link to a list of the city's immunization clinics which offer the HPV vaccine. In addition, the Bureau of Immunization webpage provides links to the CDC webpage for more information about HPV and the vaccine.

Calls to 311 requesting information about the availability of the vaccine were transferred to a DOHMH call center. The DOHMH provided information about the nearest city immunization clinics and HHC child health centers according to a caller's zip code. In 2007, neither the DOHMH website nor 311 provided any information on where to obtain the HPV vaccine in New York City.

**The Citywide Immunization Registry now monitors HPV vaccinations.**

According to New York City Health Code, all persons authorized to administer immunizations must report immunizations given to children under the age of eighteen to the DOHMH within 14 days. DOHMH now monitors the Citywide Immunization Registry for HPV vaccinations to track how many young girls and teenagers are obtaining the vaccine. According to DOHMH, as of July 31, 2008, more than 286,000 HPV doses had been reported to the registry. The Public Advocate's 2007 report recommended the Citywide Immunization Registry monitor HPV vaccinations.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Offer the HPV vaccine at STD walk-in clinics and at all HHC child and teen health clinics.**

Because the CDC's ACIP has recommended that all girls ages 11 and 12 obtain the HPV vaccine, the city should offer the vaccine at all the sites listed above.

- HPV is the most common sexually transmitted disease. It is therefore sensible that DOHMH STD walk-in clinics, which already offer vaccine for other common STDs such as Hepatitis A and B, should offer the vaccine for HPV.
- HHC child and teen health clinics provide medical care for children, including immunizations and other preventive care, and therefore should offer the HPV vaccine at all facilities.

**The immunization clinic at the Corona Health Center should expand services to include children.**

Currently, the immunization clinic at the Corona Health Center only serves adults. Since it is the only walk-in clinic in Queens, the clinic should expand immunization services to include children.

**The DOHMH should expand immunization services in Staten Island.**

According to the DOHMH, the Richmond immunization clinic in Staten Island will reopen in October 2008 but will only remain open until December 2008. Without a fully operational clinic, Staten Island is underserved.

**Train all applicable HHC clinic staff so that they are knowledgeable about the circumstances in which a child is eligible for state health insurance and/or to receive the vaccine for free or at little cost through the VFC program.**

According to HHC, nearly 95 percent of HHC child patients are eligible to receive a free HPV vaccine under the VFC program and that HHC staff would assist eligible patients enroll in state health insurance programs.<sup>54</sup> The Office of the Public Advocate is unaware of any circumstances in which parents or legal guardians should have to pay \$600<sup>55</sup> for their uninsured child to obtain the HPV vaccine. All clinic staff, especially those answering phones, should be aware of the VFC program so that they can assist children who may be eligible. In addition, all clinics that

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<sup>54</sup> See 42.

<sup>55</sup> Wyckoff Gardens Houses Child Health Clinic stated the estimated cost for the vaccine and office visit would be \$600.

have the necessary capacity should be able to assist parents or guardians to obtain state health insurance for their child or at least refer them to a representative who can.

**Ensure that staff is available to answer calls during clinic hours.**

Unanswered calls and incorrect information about the availability of the vaccine can create an obstacle to preventative care. Clinic staff should be available to attend to patient calls.

**Ensure that immunization services at DOHMH immunization clinics are available every business day.**

Limited availability of immunization services create an obstacle to accessing preventative care for teens and young women. Medical staff should be available to provide immunization services during the business week.

## Appendix A

### DOHMH Immunization walk-in clinics

Clinic Name	Borough*	Population Served	HPV Vaccine Available	If No Insurance, Out-of-Pocket Costs
Tremont Health Center	Bronx	Children** and Adults	Yes	No
Chelsea Health Center	Manhattan	Children** and Adults	Yes	No
Corona Health Center	Queens	Adults	Only available to adults	No
Homecrest Health Center	Brooklyn	Children** and Adults	Yes	No
Fort Greene Health Center***	Brooklyn	Children** and Adults	Yes	No

\* At the time of this investigation, there was no clinic in Staten Island. In the 2007 report, there was a clinic in Staten Island, but it only served adults.

\*\* Children must be ages 4 and older.

\*\*\*In the 2007 report, this clinic had not opened yet.

## Appendix B

### DOHMH STD walk-in clinics

Clinic Name	Borough	HPV Vaccine Available
Morrisania	Bronx	No
Central Harlem	Manhattan	No
Chelsea	Manhattan	Unable to reach staff member.
East Harlem	Manhattan	No
Riverside	Manhattan	No
Corona	Queens	Unable to reach staff member.
Jamaica	Queens	Unable to reach staff member.
Bushwick	Brooklyn	Unable to reach staff member.
Fort Greene	Brooklyn	Unable to reach staff member.
Richmond	Staten Island	No

## Appendix C

### HHC Child and Teen Health Clinics

Clinic Name	Borough	HPV Vaccine Available	If No Insurance, Out-of-Pocket Costs
Child Health Center At Glebe Avenue	Bronx	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Daniel Webster Houses Child Health Clinic	Bronx	Yes	Unable to obtain fee amount.
Gunhill Health Center	Bronx	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Health Center at Tremont	Bronx	Yes	Referred to immunization clinic.
Highbridge Health Center	Bronx	Yes	Unable to obtain fee amount.
Jacobi Medical Center	Bronx	Yes	Unable to obtain fee amount.
Lincoln Medical & Mental Health Center	Bronx	Yes	Must register as patient and make office visit to obtain fee amount.
Melrose Houses Child Health Clinic	Bronx	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Morrisania Diagnostic & Treatment Center	Bronx	Yes	Sliding scale cost.
North Central Bronx Hospital	Bronx	Yes	Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance or sliding scale cost.
Segundo Ruiz Belvis Diagnostic & Treatment Center	Bronx	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Baruch Houses Family Health Center	Manhattan	Yes	Unable to obtain fee amount.
Bellevue Hospital Center	Manhattan	No	
Drew Hamilton Houses Health Center	Manhattan	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Dyckman Clinica De Las Americas	Manhattan	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
East Harlem Child Health Clinic	Manhattan	Yes	Unable to obtain fee amount.
Gouverneur Diagnostic & Treatment Center	Manhattan	Yes	Sliding scale cost.
Grant Houses Clinic	Manhattan	Yes	Must register as patient and make office visit to obtain fee amount.
Harlem Hospital Center	Manhattan	Yes	Sliding scale cost.
Judson Health Center	Manhattan	Yes	Sliding scale cost.
La Clinica Del Barrio	Manhattan	Yes	Must register as patient and make office visit to obtain fee amount.
Manhattanville/St. Nicholas Houses Child Health Care Center	Manhattan	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Metropolitan Hospital Center	Manhattan	Yes	Must register as patient and make office visit to obtain fee amount.

\* Unable to reach a staff member.

\*\* Closed for renovation.

Renaissance Health Care Network Diagnostic & Treatment Center	Manhattan	Yes	Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance or sliding scale cost.
Riverside Child Health Clinic	Manhattan	Yes	Must register as patient and make office visit to obtain fee amount.
Roberto Clemente Health Center	Manhattan	Yes	Unable to obtain fee amount.
Smith Communicare Health Center	Manhattan	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Sydenham Health Center	Manhattan	Yes	Must register as patient and make office visit to obtain fee amount.
Washington Heights Child Health Care Center	Manhattan	Unknown	
Astoria Child Health Clinic	Queens	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Corona Child Health Clinic	Queens	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Elmhurst Hospital Center	Queens	Yes	Cost of office visit and vaccine.
Junction Boulevard Child Health Clinic	Queens	Yes	Unable to obtain fee amount.
Medical Center at Sunnyside	Queens	Yes	Cost of office visit (\$100) plus cost of vaccine (\$18).
Queens Hospital Center	Queens	Yes	Must register as patient and make office visit to obtain fee amount.
Parsons Communicare Clinic	Queens	Yes	Must register as patient and make office visit to obtain fee amount.
Ridgewood Communicare Clinic	Queens	Yes	Unable to obtain fee amount.
Woodside Houses Child Health Clinic	Queens	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Brevoort Houses Child Health Clinic*	Brooklyn	Unreachable	
Brownsville Child Health Clinic	Brooklyn	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Bushwick Community Health Center	Brooklyn	Yes	Must register as patient and make office visit to obtain fee amount.
Bushwick Communicare	Brooklyn	No	
Coney Island Hospital	Brooklyn	Yes	Must register as patient and make office visit to obtain fee amount.
Crown Heights Child Health Center**	Brooklyn	N/A	N/A
Cumberland Diagnostic & Treatment Center	Brooklyn	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
East New York Diagnostic & Treatment Center	Brooklyn	Yes	Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance or sliding scale cost.
Eleanor Roosevelt Houses Child Health Clinic	Brooklyn	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.

\* Unable to reach a staff member.

\*\* Closed for renovation.

Fort Greene Child Health Clinic	Brooklyn	Yes	Must register as patient and make office visit to obtain fee amount.
Greenpoint Community Health Center	Brooklyn	Yes	Unable to obtain fee amount.
Homecrest Child Health Clinic	Brooklyn	Yes	Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance or sliding scale cost.
Howard Houses Child Health Clinic	Brooklyn	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Ida G. Israel Community Health Center	Brooklyn	Yes	Cost of office visit.
Jonathan Williams Houses Child Health Clinic	Brooklyn	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Kings County Hospital Center	Brooklyn	Unknown	
KCH Fifth Avenue Women's & Children's Health Center	Brooklyn	Yes	Unable to obtain fee amount.
Lafayette Houses Child Health Clinic	Brooklyn	Unknown	
Sumner Avenue Houses Child Health Clinic	Brooklyn	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Sutter Avenue Child Health Clinic	Brooklyn	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Williamsburg Child Health Clinic	Brooklyn	Yes	Unable to obtain fee amount.
Williamsburg Health Center	Brooklyn	Yes	Unable to obtain fee amount.
Woodhull Medical and Mental Health Center	Brooklyn	Yes	Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance or sliding scale cost.
Wyckoff Gardens Houses Child Health Clinic	Brooklyn	Yes	Estimated \$600.
Mariner's Harbor Houses Child Health Clinic	Staten Island	Yes	None. Will assist those without insurance obtain insurance.
Stapleton Child Health Clinic	Staten Island	Yes	Unable to obtain fee amount.

\* Unable to reach a staff member.

\*\* Closed for renovation.