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Editor's Note

In Sarah Bishop's argumentative essay, "Mandating the HPV Vaccine," she offers the newest of debates in the long-standing discussion of teens and sex—the HPV vaccine. She chooses to approach her audience with a direct argument: "The HPV vaccine should be mandated [for] young teens everywhere." Her use of ethos, pathos, and logos illustrates and develops her claims about the vaccine. Bishop draws support for her argument from current journal articles and web sites, and then furthers an appeal to ethos by identifying herself as a candidate for the vaccine. Describing the virus as "unknowingly common" among men and women, she also incites pathos in her reader: "[C]hildren have the right to be protected." Appealing via logos, she constructs a path of evidence built on facts and testimony.

To set up and then support a good argument a writer should also account for opposition. Bishop identifies her opposition as "conservative families" who might be opposed to mandating the HPV Vaccine. How does she acknowledge their voices? Does she represent them fairly? Did she include all opposing voices on the issue?

Mandating the HPV Vaccine

Sarah Bishop

The debate about teens remaining abstinent from sex has been a long running argument. Society is often torn between encouraging abstinence and practicing safe sex, but the reality is that "Nearly half of teens have had sex by their 18th birthday" (McDowell 3). With this in mind, a new vaccine has been made available that prevents 70% of cervical cancers that arise from sexual intercourse ("HPV and HPV Vaccine"). The human papillomavirus is unknowingly common and is diagnosed in 10,000 women a year, causing 4,000 deaths per year ("HPV Vaccine Question and Answers"). If we take the responsibility to vaccinate young girls and boys, to be safe, we can eliminate many unnecessary deaths. Because this vaccine is a great scientific discovery that should be put to good use, the HPV vaccine should be mandated in young teens everywhere.

The HPV virus has gone unseen by many until the recent controversy over the vaccine. However, this virus is thought to be one of the world's most wide spread STD's. "According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), about 6.2 million women and men are newly infected every year" with HPV (Bristol). HPV has over 100 strains, with more than thirty that are sexually transmitted. Some of these strains are known to cause cervix, vulva, vagina, anus, or penis cancers and others can cause genital warts. "Studies have found the vaccine to be almost 100% effective in preventing diseases caused by the four HPV types covered by the vaccine—including precancers of the cervix,

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vulva and vagina, and genital warts” (“HPV Vaccine Questions and Answers”). The HPV vaccine is recommended for eleven to twelve year old girls, but can be administered as young as nine. The vaccine can also be given to those between thirteen and twenty-six. However, it is best to be vaccinated young because the vaccine works best before the first sexual experience. This way the vaccine has full power, protecting against the main cancer causing HPV strands. For women that are already sexually active the vaccine will still prevent those cancer causing strains that have not yet been acquired. This vaccine can be highly effective if women are vaccinated at the ideal time, the younger the better.

The FDA licensed the first vaccine to prevent several types of cervical cancer and other diseases caused by HPV in June 2006. The new vaccine, “Gardasil(r), protects against four HPV types (6,11,16, 18), which are responsible for 70% of cervical cancers and 90% of genital warts” (“HPV and HPV Vaccine”). The vaccine is made from non-infectious HPV particles and can be highly effective. However, this vaccine does not replace other precautionary strategies because it does not prevent all types of HPV.

Women are not the only ones being affected by the HPV vaccine. Although there has been less research on the effects of the vaccine on men, there is still thought to be some benefits. The HPV vaccine could possibly prevent genital warts and rare cancers, like penile and anal cancer in men. There could also be indirect effects that would benefit women and girls. Currently, many studies are going on to research the exact benefits the HPV vaccine could have in men.

Mandating vaccines of any kind is often a controversial issue because people like to make decisions for themselves and their children. However, in cases like the HPV vaccine it is vital that children be vaccinated because it has the power to prevent a highly widespread cancer. Many argue that deciding if a child should be vaccinated is between the parent and the child. Also, many conservative families think giving a young girl the HPV vaccine would encourage sexual activity. The mandating of this vaccine relates back to the same idea of teaching abstinence or safe sex in schools. The reality is that many teens are having sex and many parents are either in denial or have religious views that they think will prevent their child from having sex. But, teens live in realistic situations, they are exposed to more than parents often realize. High school these days is much different than when parents were there, sex and drug use are common and enticing to many teens. When asked to “Tell the Truth! Do you have a secret about your sex life that you’d never tell your parents? 1 in 11 14-year-olds say YES. 1 in 8 15-year-olds say YES. 1 in 5 16-year-olds say YES. 1 in 3 17-year-olds say YES (Weill). “We lie to you because we don’t want to disappoint you . . . or get yelled at” (Bethany qtd. in Weill). With this in mind, parents frequently do not know that their teens are involved in sex-

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ual activity and are exposing themselves to the dangerous HPV. In mandating the vaccine, many young lives would be saved, regardless if parents are aware their children are having sex or not.

Safety is another concern for people against mandating a newer vaccine. If something becomes mandatory people want to know it will be safe for the population. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) are closely supervising the safety and use of the HPV vaccine in the general public. The FDA has licensed the vaccine as both safe and effective. The vaccine has been tested in over 11,000 females (between the ages 9-26) and has shown little or no side effects, the most common being soreness in the injection area (“HPV Vaccine Questions and Answers”). The minor side effects that have been shown by these studies are insignificant and clearly outweighed by the powerful cancer preventing benefits of the vaccine.

People seldom realize that HPV is a widespread cancer and can affect them or their children. But for Tamika Felder this reality became all too real. She was a healthy twenty-five year old who had a happy and exhilarating life. She was on her way to a successful career in TV production, when a boil under her arm caught her attention and forced her to see a doctor. It turned out Tamika was suffering from advanced cervical cancer and had to undergo a hysterectomy. In doing research about her disease she discovered that “cervical cancer is caused almost exclusively by the extremely common human papillomavirus (HPV), which infects 80 percent of women by their 50s” (Bristol). This was shocking and very upsetting to Tamika:

How could this be so common yet I’ve never heard of it? she asks. Her ire intensified when she discovered how it was transmitted. My best friend’s husband said, ‘I think that’s caused by an STD.’ I remember getting really angry with him—how dare you say something like that to me—and then finding out he was right. (Bristol)

People need to be informed and aware about this extensively popular disease that is so easily spread. Our children have a right to be protected by this powerful vaccine that could save many lives.

Right now legislation for mandating the vaccine is spreading throughout the country. Many states are involved in this process. Michigan was the first state to introduce a bill to mandate the vaccine for girls entering the sixth grade, but it was not enacted. However, since then more than 39 states have introduced measures that would require, fund or educate people about the vaccine. Since the beginning of this year bills making the vaccine mandatory have been introduced in 24 states and the District of Columbia (Bristol). State legislators are feuding about mandating, but the bottom line is “Vaccinating against HPV will save lives — period” (Bristol). Many children and teens only receive healthcare because of mandates and schools are often the only place for these

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children to be reached. Also, mandating the vaccine could make it more affordable and easier to get regardless of socioeconomic status.

It is astonishing that people were so unaware of this widespread cancer before the HPV vaccine had come out. It is vital that we raise awareness about this life threatening cancer that now has the ability to be prevented. Parents need to understand that teens are not always honest about their sex lives and should be vaccinated in any case in order to save countless valuable lives. “‘We have a social and moral obligation to protect our daughters,’ said mandate sponsor Mary Cheh” (Bristol). The children of today are the faces of tomorrow and we should be taking every precautionary step to protect their lives when we can. This vaccine has the ability to save lives. Tamika Felder who was severely affected by HPV says, “I’m for the vaccine being mandatory, going through what I went through. If you walked a day in my shoes, you would never want this to happen to anybody else” (qtd. in Bristol). As a young woman myself I will surely be getting the vaccine soon and I would recommend any young woman to at least be educated about this great vaccine. This vaccine has the power to save lives, if we let it, and every young woman deserves to be able to save her life.

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