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Wording Matters When Pediatricians Recommend HPV Vaccination

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Wording Matters When Pediatricians Recommend HPV Vaccination

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1 INTRODUCTION

2

3 Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination prevents infection from highly 4 prevalent papillomaviruses that cause genital warts and the high-risk HPV 5 types that cause an estimated 91% of cervical and anal, 75% of vaginal, 69% of vulvar, 63% of penile, and 70% of oropharyngeal cancers.¹ 6 7 However, over 15 years after Food and Drug Administration approval and the recommendation in 2006 by the Centers for Disease Control and 8 9 Prevention (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, HPV 10 vaccine initiation (receipt of ≥1 HPV vaccine dose) among 13- to 17-yearolds remains suboptimal for both US females (77.1%) and males (73.1%),² 11 and completion rates remain below the Healthy People 2030 goal of 80%.³ 12 While the CDC endorses a bundled approach to HPV vaccination at all 11-13 and 12-year-old visits,⁴ a 2014 survey conducted among pediatricians and 14 15 family physicians found that 27% did not strongly endorse HPV vaccination 16 and 26% did not provide timely recommendations.⁵ In addition, 22.5% of 17 parents in the 2018 national NIS-Teen survey reported that they did not 18 receive a provider recommendation for HPV vaccine.⁶ A 2015 systematic 19 review of provider communication reported evidence that when physicians 20 did recommend HPV vaccination, they used a gualified recommendation for 21 HPV vaccine compared with other adolescent vaccines. Although 22 physicians delivered more consistent HPV vaccination recommendations 23 with increasing adolescent age, they missed opportunities to target 11- and 24 12-year-old patients, the recommended age to initiate the vaccine.⁷

25 Physician recommendation is a primary determinant of HPV 26 vaccination initiation, mediating parental awareness of HPV vaccination and vaccination behaviors.⁸⁻¹⁰ A qualitative study assessed 43 provider-parent 27 28 discussions reported clear, presumptive physician and that 29 recommendations and providers' personal endorsements led to higher HPV vaccine uptake among adolescents.9 Underscoring the importance of 30 31 physician recommendation regarding HPV vaccination, the CDC and the 32 American Academy of Pediatrics endorse a presumptive, bundled 33 approach, in which the provider presents HPV vaccination bundled between Tdap and meningococcal at all 11- or 12-year-old visits.¹¹ The CDC 34 35 promotes this recommendation method, describing it in provider education 36 materials as the "Same Way, Same Day" approach.

This study examined the association between HPV vaccination initiation, physician characteristics associated with recommendation style, and how pediatricians deliver HPV vaccination recommendations to parents of adolescents, particularly focused on the recommended initiation age group (11-12 years). Specifically, we examined how providers describe their 42 HPV vaccination recommendation word choice and the effect of different 43 pediatricians' recommendation approaches on increasing HPV vaccination 44 initiation among patients 11-12 years old based on electronic health records 45 (EHRs). Examining physician characteristics associated with HPV 46 vaccination recommendation style, as well as effect of HPV vaccination 47 recommendation framing on HPV vaccination initiation outcomes, among 48 11- and 12-year-olds will inform physician-targeted interventions aimed at 49 increasing effectiveness of provider recommendations delivered to parents 50 of younger adolescents.

51

52 **Methods**

53

54 We conducted a cross-sectional, observational study of pediatricians 55 (n=134) who provide primary care to adolescents between 11-12 years of 56 age to examine the effect of pediatrician recommendation wording on HPV 57 vaccination initiation. We linked patient-level data from a large pediatric 58 system's EHRs with pediatrician-level data from a provider survey 59 assessing correlates of HPV vaccination recommendation practices. The 60 pediatric clinic network comprises 51 clinics in the greater Houston, Texas, 61 area, with more than 200 board-certified pediatricians. As one of the largest 62 networks of pediatric practices in the US in one of the most ethnically 63 diverse cities, the pediatric network provides full-service care to a diverse 64 population.

65 We examined medical record of patients meeting the following eligibility criteria: patients had not initiated HPV vaccination as of October 66 67 1, 2014, patients had attended a pediatrician visit between October 1, 2014, 68 and September 30, 2015, and their pediatrician completed an HPV 69 vaccination survey. This study was conducted as part of a larger, multilevel 70 program targeting clinic systems, pediatricians, and patients to improve 71 HPV vaccination rates. This collaborative effort included the clinic network 72 leadership, The University of Texas School of Public Health, and Baylor 73 College of Medicine. The study was approved by the Institutional Review 74 Board at The University of Texas Health Sciences Center at Houston and 75 the Institutional Review Board at Baylor College of Medicine.

76

PEDIATRICIAN SURVEY. The research team conducted a survey of all
pediatricians practicing in the pediatric network. Pediatricians received an
email link to an online survey between August and September 2015. The
survey required fewer than 30 minutes to complete, and pediatricians
received a \$50 electronic gift card upon completion.

82 The survey assessed pediatricians' vaccination practices, and 83 experiences and perceptions of organizational and patient barriers when 84 recommending HPV, Tdap, and meningococcal vaccinations for 85 adolescents. Pediatricians were asked to respond to the question, "Choose 86 the statement that is closest to how you typically introduce adolescent 87 vaccinations during a pediatric patient visit" with the following response options: 1) "Your child is due for three vaccines, including the HPV vaccine"; 88 89 2) "Your child is due for two vaccines, Tdap and meningococcal. There is 90 also the HPV vaccine, which is optional"; 3) "Your child is due for three 91 vaccines: Tdap, HPV, and meningococcal vaccine"; 4) "Your child is due for Tdap and meningococcal vaccine, and we can discuss the HPV vaccine if 92 93 you like"; and 5) "Other (specific)." The third choice, bundling HPV 94 vaccination between the other adolescent recommended vaccines, 95 exemplifies the CDC's guidelines for how pediatricians may deliver a brief. 96 ungualified, strong HPV vaccine recommendation to parents of 97 adolescents.¹¹

98

COVARIATES. The survey included questions on age, sex, race/ethnicity,
years since completion of residency training, patient volume (number of
patients seen in a typical day), and number of years working at the clinic.
We used EHRs to identify patient characteristics, which included age, sex,
parent-reported race/ethnicity, and type of health insurance (public or
private/commercial).

105

OUTCOME VARIABLE. We used EHRs to obtain adolescent vaccination outcomes, including HPV, Tdap, and meningococcal vaccination. The main study outcome measure, HPV vaccination initiation, was a binary variable (yes/no) indicating whether each patient received the first dose of the HPV vaccine anytime within the 12-month study period.

111

112 **ANALYSIS.** Pediatrician characteristics are presented by comparing physicians whose patients' HPV vaccine initiation rates fell above or below 113 114 the median percentage of eligible patients who initiated vaccination during 115 the study period (<25% versus ≥25%). Patient characteristics are presented 116 by HPV vaccine initiation status. Unadjusted, multilevel, generalized linear 117 models were conducted with a logit link function with binomial distribution 118 and randomly varying intercepts using patient-level HPV vaccination initiation clustered by treating physician to calculate the association 119 120 between each patient- and physician-level characteristic and physician recommendation strategy with the odds of vaccination initiation. Next, we 121 122 used a multivariable model that controlled for the physician and patient 123 characteristics associated with HPV vaccine initiation in univariable 124 analyses. Multilevel models allowed for variation between patients across 125 all groups and within each physician cluster. To characterize physician-level 126 effects, a latent random variable was used to calculate the physician-127 specific probabilities of patient vaccination initiation. A significance level of 128 α =0.05 was selected. All analyses were conducted using SAS 9.4 software 129 (Cary, NC).

130

131 **Results**

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133 A total of 134 pediatricians (59.8%) completed the survey (Table 1).

134

135 Table 1. Characteristics of Physicians (n=134), by the Percent of Patients Who Initiated

136 HPV Vaccination

	Total	Physicians	Physicians
	physician	with <25% of	with ≥25% of
	population	patients	patients
		initiating HPV	initiating HPV
		vaccine	vaccine
	n (column %)	n (row %)	n (row %)
Total physician cohort	134 (100.0)	67 (50.0)	67 (50.0)
Physician demographics	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	(, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	
Age			
< 40	49 (36.6)	20 (40.8)	29 (59.2)
40-49	40 (29.9)	18 (45.0)	22 (55.0)
50-59	23 (17.2)	14 (60.9)	9 (39.1)
>60	22 (16.4)	15 (68.2)	7 (31.8)
Race/ethnicity	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	(, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	· · · · ·
Non-Hispanic White	67 (50.0)	35 (52.2)	32 (47.8)
Black	12 (9.0)	4 (33.3)	8 (66.7)
Hispanic	13 (9.7)	6 (46.2)	7 (53.9)
Other	23 (17.2)	11 (47.8)	12 (52.2)
Missing	19 (14.2)	11 (57.9)	8 (42.1)
Daily patient volume			
Less than 30	81 (60.5)	36 (44.4)	45 (55.6)
30 or more	46 (34.3)	27 (58.7)	19 (41.3)
Missing	7 (5.2)	4 (57.1)	3 (42.9)
Sex	× ,	, , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , , ,	
Female	94 (70.1)	44 (46.8)	50 (53.2)
Male	40 (29.9)	23 (57.5)	17 (42.5)
Time since residency (y)	· · ·	· · ·	. ,
<5	15 (11.2)	7 (46.7)	8 (53.3)
5-9	30 (22.4)	10 (33.3)	20 (66.7)
10-14	31 (23.1)	14 (45.2)	17 (54.8)
>15	58 (43.3)	36 (62.1)	22 (37.9)
Work time at clinic (y)			· /

5-9	28 (20.9)	11 (39.3)	17 (60.7)	
10-15	19 (14.2)	13 (68.4)	6 (31.6)	
>15	41 (30.6)	23 (56.1)	18 (43.9)	
Missing	7 (5.2)	4 (57.1)	3 (42.9)	

- 137
- 138

139 Among those, the majority were female, under the age of 50, and non-140 Hispanic white. Most respondents saw fewer than 30 patients per day, and half had worked in their respective clinic for less than 10 years and practiced 141 142 for more than 10 years since residency. Among the patients 11-12 years of 143 age during the study period (n=18,117), an average of 24.8% of patients 144 initiated the HPV vaccination series (Table 2). Pediatrician characteristics 145 associated with increased odds of vaccination initiation included physicians' 146 younger age, being female, and seeing less than 30 patients per day. 147 Physicians with less than 25% of their patients initiating HPV vaccination 148 were mostly over the age of 60, non-Hispanic white, and female. Compared 149 with physicians under 40 years of age, the odds of adolescents' initiation 150 were significantly lower among physicians between the ages of 50 and 59 151 (OR: 0.68, 95% CI: 0.49-0.93) and those 60 and older (OR: 0.59, 95% CI: 152 0.41-0.86). No other physician characteristics included in the multivariable 153 model were statistically associated with HPV vaccination initiation.

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- 155

156 Table 2. Patient Demographic Characteristics and HPV Vaccination Initiation

	Total patient population n (%)	Initiated vaccination* n (%)	Did not initiate vaccination n (%)	chi2 p-value
Total 11-12 year-olds	18,117 (100%)	4262 (23.5%)	13,855 (76.5%)	
Sex				0.039
Female	8791 (48.5)	2127 (24.2)	6664 (75.8)	
Male	9326 (51.5)	2135 (22.9)	7191 (77.1)	
Race/Ethnicity				<0.000
Non-Hispanic White	8193 (45.2)	1453 (17.7)	6740 (82.3)	
Black	2264 (12.5)	684 (30.2)	1580 (69.8)	
Hispanic	4457 (24.6)	1450 (32.5)	3007 (67.5)	
Other	3203 (17.7)	675 (21.1)	2528 (78.9)	
Insurance type				<0.000
Public	4279 (23.6)	1641 (38.4)	2638 (61.6)	
Private	13,838 (76.4)	2621 (18.9)	11,217 (81.1)	

157 October 1, 2014–September 30, 2015 (n=18,117)

158 *Patients who received the first HPV vaccine dose.

60	Va	Vaccination Initiation Outcome Groups.					
			Total physician	Physicians with <25% of patients	Physicians with ≥25% of patients		
			population	initiating HPV vaccine	initiating HPV vaccine		
			n (%)	n (%)	n (%)		
	Wo	ording of physician					
	rec	commendation*					
		"Your child is due for three vaccines, including the HPV vaccine." <i>(Nonbundled approach)</i>	20 (14.9)	12 (60.0)	8 (40.0)		
	2.	"Your child is due for two vaccines, Tdap and meningococcal. There is also the HPV vaccine, which is optional." (<i>Presumptive, nonbundled</i> approach)	32 (23.9)	24 (75.0)	8 (25.0)		
	3.	"Your child is due for three vaccines: Tdap, HPV, and meningococcal vaccine." (Presumptive, bundled approach)	69 (51.5)	21 (30.4)	48 (69.6)		
	4.	"Your child is due for the Tdap and meningococcal vaccine, and we can discuss the HPV vaccine if you would like." (Nonbundled, participatory approach)	4 (3.0)	4 (100)	0 (0.0)		
	5.	Other	9 (6.7)	6 (66.7)	3 (33.3)		

Table 3. Physician Self-reported HPV Vaccination Recommendation Style, by 2 HPV Vaccination Initiation Outcome Groups.

* Survey question for HPV recommendation outcomes: How do you typically
 introduce adolescent vaccinations during a pediatric patient visit?

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165 Table 3 presents physicians' reported responses to the question regarding how they presented their HPV vaccination recommendation, 166 comparing responses by two groups: the high vaccinators (greater that 25% 167 168 of patients initiating) and the low vaccinators (less than 25% of patients 169 initiating). Overall, 48.5% of physicians reported using a nonbundled 170 approach to recommending HPV vaccination. Among physicians with 25% 171 or more of their patients initiating the HPV vaccine, the top three recommendation styles reported were: 1) "Your child is due for three 172 173 vaccines: Tdap, HPV, and meningococcal vaccine" (69.6%), 2) "Your child

174 is due for two vaccines, Tdap and meningococcal. There is also the HPV vaccine, which is optional" (25.0%), and 3) "Your child is due for three 175 vaccines, including the HPV vaccine" (40.0%). However, among 176 177 pediatricians with less than 25% of their patients initiating the vaccine, the 178 more common recommendation approaches included: 1) "Your child is due 179 for two vaccines, Tdap and meningococcal. There is also the HPV vaccine, which is optional" (75.0%), 2) "Your child is due for three vaccines, including 180 181 the HPV vaccine" (60.0%), and 3) "Your child is due for three vaccines: 182 Tdap, HPV, and meningococcal vaccine" (30.4%). Multivariable analysis 183 also indicated a significantly greater likelihood of vaccine initiation among 184 providers using the presumptive, bundled recommendation approach: "Your 185 child is due for three vaccines: Tdap, HPV, and meningococcal vaccine" 186 (OR: 1.99, 95% CI: 1.52-2.60) (Table 4). On the other hand, the 187 presumptive, nonbundled recommendation approach was not significantly 188 associated with a greater likelihood of vaccine initiation in univariable or 189 multivariable analyses. Of note, there was an inverse association between the participatory approach "Your child is due for the Tdap and 190 191 meningococcal vaccine; and we can discuss the HPV vaccine if you would 192 like" and the odds of initiating the vaccine in univariable analysis (OR = 0.33, 193 95% CI= 0.14-0.76).

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195

196 Table 4. Univariable and Multivariable Analysis for the Odds of Patient Initiation of HPV

197 <u>Vaccination (n=18,117)</u>

	Univariate		Mult	tivariable*
	OR	95% CI	OR	95% CI
Level 1: Patient characteristics				
Sex				
Female	1		NI	
Male				
Race/ethnicity				
Non-Hispanic White	1		1	
Black	1.25	1.11-1.42	1.15	1.02-1.31
Hispanic	1.52	1.38-1.68	1.40	1.26-1.55
Other	1.13	1.01-1.26	1.12	1.00-1.25
Insurance type				
Private	1		1	
Public	1.76	1.59-1.94	1.64	1.48-1.81
Level 2: Physician characteristics				
Physician age				
< 40	1		1	
40-49	0.77	0.54-1.09	0.89	0.68-1.18
50-59	0.58	0.39-0.87	0.68	0.49-0.93
>60	0.44	0.29-0.67	0.59	0.41-0.86

Race/Ethnicity				
Non-Hispanic White	1		NI	
Black	1.48	0.87-2.52		
Hispanic	1.48	0.89-2.46		
Other	1.16	0.76-1.75		
Missing	0.91	0.59-1.42		
Daily patient volume				
Less than 30	1		1	
30 or more	0.69	0.50-0.93	0.83	0.65-1.06
Missing	0.48	0.25-0.92	0.61	0.36-1.04
Sex				
Male	1		1	
Female	1.48	1.08-2.03	1.11	0.85-1.45
Time since residency (y)				
<5	1		NI	
5-9	1.35	0.81-2.25		
10-14	1.00	0.61-1.66		
>15	0.61	0.39-0.98		
Work time at clinic (y)				
< 5	1		NI	
5-10	1.00	0.67-1.51		
10-15	0.52	0.33-0.82		
>15	0.61	0.43-0.88		
Missing	0.42	0.22-0.83		

Physician communication How do you typically introduce adolescent vaccinations during a pediatric patient visit?

"Your child is due for two vaccines, Tdap and meningococcal. There is also the HPV vaccine, which is optional." <i>(Nonbundled approach)</i>	1		1	
"Your child is due for three vaccines, including the HPV vaccine." (Presumptive, nonbundled approach)	1.33	0.85-2.07	1.20	0.83-1.75
"Your child is due for three vaccines: Tdap, HPV, and meningococcal vaccine." <i>(Presumptive, bundled approach)</i>	2.05	1.47-2.84	1.99	1.52-2.60
"Your child is due for the Tdap and meningococcal vaccine, and we can discuss the HPV vaccine if you would like." (Nonbundled, participatory approach)	0.33	0.14-0.76	0.57	0.27-1.19
Other/missing	1.09	0.69-2.18	1.13	0.69-1.83

*The multivariable analysis controls for patient variables (age, race/ethnicity, public insurance) and physician variables (sex, age, and daily patient volume).

200 NI = not included in multivariable model.

201

202 **Discussion**

203

204 We examined pediatrician and patient characteristics associated with HPV 205 vaccination and the effect of pediatrician vaccination recommendation style 206 on patient HPV vaccine uptake among 134 providers and 18,117 207 adolescent patients in one of the largest pediatric networks in the US. HPV 208 vaccination among younger adolescents, before 13 years of age, is recommended due to the stronger immune response,¹² to ensure that 209 210 adolescents are immunized against HPV before preventive adolescent 211 visits become less frequent as they age,¹³ and to reduce the need for 3 212 doses, as required for those initiating the vaccine at age 15 and older. 213 Despite these benefits, in 2020 only 58.6% of US adolescents were up-to-214 date on their HPV vaccines at age 13.14 Moreover, the National Immunization Survey-Teen, 2020 data indicate that HPV initiation rates in 215 216 the US among 13-year-old adolescents were significantly lower (69.4%) 217 compared with 2 other recommended adolescent vaccines, Tdap (88.9%) 218 and meningococcal (87.5%).¹⁴

219 Despite endorsement by a number of professional organizations for 220 pediatricians to deliver strong HPV vaccine recommendations at the 11- or 221 12-year-old well visit,¹⁵ providers have been slow to deliver consistent and 222 strong (presumptive) HPV vaccination recommendations.^{10,16,17} In a 223 national survey, nearly half of providers reported delaying HPV vaccination 224 at 11- and 12-year-old visits, rather than recommending vaccination at the visit using the "same-day" approach.⁵ Previous research indicates that 225 226 providers' weak HPV vaccination recommendation approaches, including 227 qualifying the recommendation (e.g., HPV vaccination is optional or not required for school)^{7,9} or delaying strong recommendations for older 228 229 adolescents,^{7,18} translates to low HPV vaccination rates at the 11- to 12-230 vear-old adolescent visit compared with other vaccines.

231 Provider HPV vaccination recommendation approaches at 11- and 232 12-year-old visits may reflect providers' perception of parental barriers.^{19,20} 233 In a 2014 systematic review, major barriers to HPV vaccine included providers' perception of parental financial barriers, attitudes, and 234 235 concerns.²¹ In addition, physician preference to defer the vaccine was 236 related to providers' perception that parents exhibited low acceptance of the vaccine.5,22,23 237 More recent provider surveys indicated that provider 238 recommendation behaviors also depended on providers' comfort level 239 regarding talking about HPV vaccination.⁵ Time constraints were another potential factor influencing provider recommendations, with providers 240 241 reporting more time needed to discuss HPV vaccination.²⁴ Our own work 242 indicated that adolescents had significantly lower HPV vaccination initiation 243 among providers who self-reported concerns about safety, efficacy, and financial burden of HPV vaccination.²⁵ In addition, we found increased odds 244 245 of vaccination initiation among patients whose pediatrician saw less than 30 246 patients per day, possibly suggesting that providers who spent more time 247 with patients in general may be addressing parent vaccination hesitancy 248 rather than deferring the decision to future office visits. Future research is 249 needed to examine this finding.

250 Findings from this study link EHR-based HPV vaccination initiation 251 outcomes to the presumptive, bundled recommendation approach. The 252 association between recommendation style and HPV vaccination initiation 253 provides empirical evidence that pediatricians' wording matters when 254 recommending HPV vaccination initiation to parents of younger 255 adolescents. A strength of this work is the diversity among pediatricians, 256 patients, and clinic settings, as well as use of EHRs to document initiation 257 outcomes among 11- and 12-year-olds, specifically. Importantly, univariable 258 results also demonstrated an inverse association between recommending 259 the HPV vaccine in a participatory conversational approach ("Your child is 260 due for the Tdap and meningococcal vaccine, and we can discuss the HPV 261 vaccine if you would like") and the separated-out approach (Your child is due for three vaccines, including the HPV vaccine) and HPV vaccine rates. 262 263 Our findings are supported by intervention studies that reported higher clinic 264 vaccination rates among intervention clinics that received provider training to use presumptive wording compared with clinics that received provider 265 266 training to engage in participatory conversations with parents.^{26,27} Our study 267 adds to this body of research by showing that a presumptive approach alone 268 may not be enough. We found that a presumptive, bundled approach, 269 recommending the HPV vaccine the same way as other adolescent 270 vaccines, was associated with a greater likelihood of HPV vaccination, while 271 a presumptive approach that singles out the HPV vaccine ("Your child is 272 due for three vaccines, including the HPV vaccine") is not effective. These 273 findings support the view that presumptive, bundled vaccination 274 recommendations, with no qualifiers, thus presenting HPV vaccine in the 275 same way as other recommended vaccines, will increase HPV vaccination 276 rates among 11-12 year old adolescents.

There were some limitations of the study. First, this was a crosssectional study, limiting conclusions regarding causality. Also, vaccinations could have occurred at any time in the 12-month period; however, most 280 patients received vaccinations either immediately after receiving a provider 281 recommendation or at a later visit during the same year. A small proportion 282 of vaccinations occurred outside the clinic system and were later entered 283 into the EHR. In these cases, the vaccination provider was registered as a 284 "non-TCP provider"; thus, those cases were not included in our analysis. 285 While we report an inverse association between HPV vaccination outcome 286 and the participatory approach ("Your child is due for the Tdap and 287 meningococcal vaccine, and we can discuss the HPV vaccine if you would 288 like") only 4 physicians reported using this approach, so this finding must 289 be interpreted with caution. Recall bias and/or social desirability bias may have influenced provider responses, inflating the proportions of providers 290 291 reporting they used the "bundled approach." Approximately 40% of physicians did not respond to the survey. While this is consistent with other 292 web-based pediatrician surveys,^{28,29} there is potential for selection bias. 293 294 Another potential limitation is that the study was limited to one urban/suburban pediatric clinic network. Nonetheless, the network 295 296 comprises 51 clinic sites based in the most racially/ethnically diverse 297 metropolitan region in the US,³⁰ lending support to the generalizability of 298 these results to other pediatric patient populations.

299

300 **Conclusion**

301

This research used EHR-based HPV vaccination outcome data to 302 demonstrate that a presumptive, bundled recommendation approach 303 304 increases the odds of HPV vaccination initiation among a diverse group of 305 providers, diverse patients, and across 51 different clinical settings. 306 Notably, this recommendation approach is brief and may take less time. 307 Findings may also inform targeting of provider HPV vaccination communication trainings. Overall, this work indicates that future vaccination 308 intervention studies are needed to improve provider delivery of presumptive 309 310 HPV vaccination recommendations to increase uptake among adolescents.

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