

CERVICAL CANCER VACCINE

SHOULD 6TH GRADERS GET THE HPV SHOT—BY LAW?

BY ANNE LANG

Cheryl Swope Lieck remembers hitting rock-bottom during her battle with cervical cancer. The attorney and mother of three, 36 at the time, was sitting on her bed the day before she was scheduled to have a hysterectomy, sobbing uncontrollably. "I was very scared," recalls Lieck, now 40, "and also very frustrated." Lieck says she had never skipped a Pap smear, and had always eaten healthily and been an active athlete. "I'd been asking every doctor I saw, 'How could this happen? I've been doing everything right!'"

Lieck beat her cancer with chemotherapy and radiation. But memories of the experience have made her and husband Ed staunch supporters of a controversial Texas law that mandates vaccination of all sixth-grade girls against four strains of the human papillomavirus (HPV), two of which can cause cervical cancer. About 10,000 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer each year in the U.S., and 4,000 die from it. In addition to the new law in Texas, similar proposals are being considered in more than 20 other states.

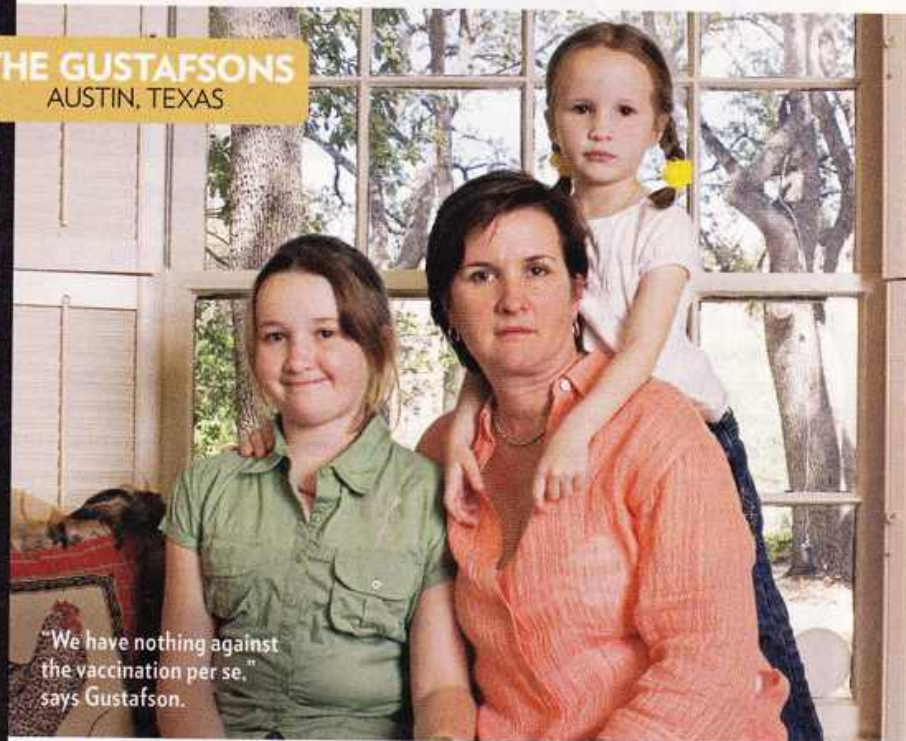
"This is the first time in history we have a vaccine that can prevent cancer, and ultimately save the lives of thousands of women," says Texas Governor Rick Perry's spokeswoman Krista Moody.

But an uproar has erupted in Texas and beyond over the use of the vaccine on girls as young as 9. HPV is a sexually transmitted disease, so proponents say the vaccine

Gardasil has no live virus and has been tested on adolescents.



THE GUSTAFSONS
AUSTIN, TEXAS



"We have nothing against the vaccination per se," says Gustafson.

“We want to give it time and not let our daughter be a guinea pig”

Jan and Danny Gustafson of Austin, whose three children include daughters Millicent, 12, and Lillian, 5, welcomed the news that a vaccine had been developed to protect against cervical cancer. But Jan, a part-time horseback riding instructor, and her attorney husband had already made the decision not to vaccinate their oldest daughter—or at least, not yet—before the governor's mandate. If the Texas law withstands opposition and goes into effect, the couple may choose to opt out. "We just don't want to rush into anything," says Jan, 42. "Since it's a new vaccine, we want to give it time and not let our daughter

be a guinea pig. After all, she is just 12, and we are confident she is not having sex."

The subject has already come up for discussion with Millicent. A girl on her swim team had the vaccination—a series of three shots over six months—and asked if Millicent would be getting it too. "She understands that there are behaviors that would put her at risk for the virus," says Jan. "She also knows we're choosing not to vaccinate her because we think the vaccine is too new to trust." Jan's hope: "That the governor will let parents be parents and make this decision for their children without intervention."

"At least HPV is now a household word. People are talking about it," says Lieck.

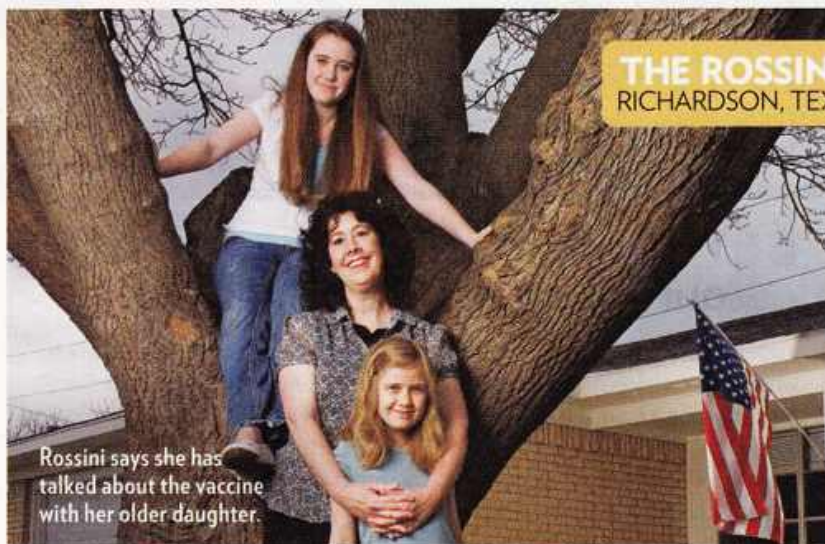
THE LIECKS ANAHUAC, TEXAS



“Our responsibility is to protect”

“As parents, our responsibility is to protect our children,” says Cheryl Swope Lieck, who plans to vaccinate her daughter Allison, 12, and eventually Cameron, 8. Lieck, 40, understands why parents might feel uncomfortable giving their children a vaccine for a disease that is sexually transmitted, but as a cervical cancer survivor, she

feels strongly that the life-saving benefits trump other concerns. “Am I teaching my kids abstinence? Absolutely. Do I think abstinence is the main way to prevent HPV? Absolutely. But what are you going to say to women who get HPV from their husbands, even when those women were virgins when they married?”



THE ROSSINIS RICHARDSON, TEXAS

Rossini says she has talked about the vaccine with her older daughter.

“An outrageous abuse of power”

Ellen Rossini, 46, and her husband, Carl, 50, send their girls, Julia, 15, and Maria, 8, to Catholic schools. “Our daughters are being raised in the moral tradition of chastity,” she says. Rossini views the effort to vaccinate sixth-graders against HPV as an attempt to eliminate a potential con-

sequence of sexual activity before marriage—an attempt, she says, that isn’t necessary in her family. “Julia has a purity of heart and confidence that practicing moral traditions will lead to true happiness—chastity, followed by monogamous marriage. It’s not a dream. Her dad and I have lived it.”

that prevents it must be administered before the onset of sexual activity, ideally among young girls (although men, too, can become infected with HPV). But for a wide range of critics—from conservative Christians to parents worried about possible side effects of a new vaccine—the idea of compulsory vaccination is intolerable. Ellen Rossini, 46, development director for the Catholic Pro-Life Committee of North Texas, says she and her husband oppose the vaccine for their two daughters, Julia, 15, and Maria, 9, on moral grounds: “The message for girls is quite clear—that sexual behavior is expected. It’s as though [vaccine supporters] are expecting young girls to carry condoms in their purses.”

Marketed under the name Gardasil, the vaccine (manufactured by Merck & Co., Inc.) was approved for use by the FDA after more than four years of testing. According to Laura Koutsky, a University of Washington epidemiologist and expert on HPV infection, test data on the vaccine so far suggest that it is as safe as other widely used inoculations, but that only time will tell for certain. “Based on what we know, the probability of adverse effects beyond five years appears to be low,” says Koutsky. “But can we rule that out completely? No.”

Parents across the country have bristled at the idea of government making sensitive decisions about their family’s health. Indeed, a backlash against the push for a mandatory cervical cancer vaccine is already taking shape. On March 14, more than two-thirds of the Texas House of Representatives voted to rescind Perry’s executive order—enough, if the state senate follows suit, to override a possible veto from the governor. Dr. Lois Ramondetta, an oncologist at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston, sees a silver lining in the debate: “With vaccinations and annual exams, cervical cancer is a totally preventable problem,” she says. “No matter what happens, the best thing about this controversy is that it has already raised women’s awareness.” ●



MailBag

“What a wonderful blessing Brad and Angelina’s family has received with the addition of Pax” **Karen Dailey** Houston, Texas

ANGELINA JOLIE

Whatever Angelina may have done in the past, her dedication to her children can only bring a smile. It’s wonderful to know she understands what each child needs and that she’s willing to put her career on hold to provide it.

Jaclyn Lebert Howell, Mich.

Congratulations to Angelina on the adoption of Pax. I was adopted in 1967, when I was a year old, by an American couple who already had three sons. I was one of the first Vietnamese babies adopted from Saigon, and I am eternally grateful to the family who saved my life.

Meri Gaudio Bullhead City, Ariz.

Am I the only one wondering if Angelina is collecting children? As an adoption advocate, I’ve met many families who seemed more interested in when and where the next child was coming from than in creating a well-adjusted family. Adopting—especially from overseas—is exciting and can be addictive.

Maxine Sullivan Post Falls, Idaho

LIVES BEHIND BARS

As the mother of three young sons, it makes me sick that people who are in prison for murdering children are able to enjoy their lives: They can watch TV, paint, take out personal ads and see their families. If these people were punished more severely, we wouldn’t have any Susan Smiths or Richard Allen Davises in the future.

Brenda Campbell Huntington Beach, Calif.

Too bad if life behind bars is tough for murderers. It isn’t supposed to be easy, is it? As someone whose parents were murdered in 2003, I have no sympathy for the difficulties these people face in prison, nor do I want to read about it in your magazine.

Name Withheld Racine, Wis.

ANNA MAE HE

I can’t believe that Anna Mae He’s foster parents could be so selfish that they would fight her birth parents for custody. Shame on them, and shame on the court system for letting this go on for seven years. Anna Mae is now where she belongs, with her biological family.

N. DePaulo Schaumburg, Ill.

How dare the Tennessee supreme court return Anna Mae He to her birth parents. Any child growing up in a healthy, stable home should be left where they are. Keep fighting, Baker family.

Lori Rettinger Murrieta, Calif.

MARCIA BRADY’S PAST

Wait a second—Maureen McCormick met her husband at a church concert? And they’ve been married for 22 years and have a wonderful daughter? What a great story to come out of Hollywood. Who cares about her rebellious twenty-something years?

Heather Grattan Boynton Beach, Fla.

Corrections In our March 5 issue, we misidentified a goose. It is a Canada goose. In our March 26 issue, we stated that Warren Easton Senior High School is in New Orleans’s French Quarter. It is in the South Street area.

WRITE US

TO CONTACT EDITORIAL: Send a fax (212-522-0794), e-mail (editor@people.com) or mail (Letters to the Editor, PEOPLE, Time & Life Building, Rockefeller Center, New York, NY 10020). Letters should include the writer’s full name, address and daytime phone number and may be edited for clarity and space.

TO VACCINATE—OR NOT

Our story on Texas Gov. Rick Perry’s controversial order mandating that all sixth-grade girls be vaccinated against the human papilloma virus (HPV) drew a range of deeply felt responses. Khrystina Slezak of Pittsburgh supports the vaccine because “even if you are a virgin until your wedding day, you can get HPV from your husband.” Tami Rawlins of Chillicothe, Ohio, plans to have her two preteens vaccinated, saying that by doing so she and her husband “are not giving our daughters permission to be sexually active, we are giving them the right to be healthy.” Others oppose the measure, some because they fear there could be long-term side effects of the new vaccine, others because they feel the government is meddling in private affairs. “This should be a matter of choice,” says Lauren A. Kelley of Georgetown, Mass. “Girls should be educated about the vaccine, but this is a family and, eventually, an individual decision.” About 20 states are considering some form of mandatory vaccination, while in Texas the senate may have enough votes to shelve the governor’s order.

