



*Diocese of Arlington*

*The Chancery*

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OFFICE OF CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

Dear Catholic School Parents,

As you may know, there has been much recent public debate about a vaccine against a virus referred to as the Human Papillomavirus (HPV). This medication was approved in June of 2006 by the Food and Drug Administration to protect against infection from this virus (i.e. HPV) which affects both men and women. While over 100 'strains' (types) of HPV have been identified, four strains of HPV are classified as 'high risk' for women for being associated with invasive cancers of the cervix.

On April 4, 2007, the General Assembly of the state of Virginia enacted legislation that requires 6<sup>th</sup> grade female students to begin the first dosage (the vaccine is distributed in three doses) before the start of the school year. Governor Kaine has since amended the bill which stated the primary responsibility for this medical decision rests with parents rather than the state. The Governor's alteration of this bill allows parents to forego (i.e. opt-out of) this treatment for their daughters without any written forms submitted to the school. This legislation is effective October 1, 2008, at which time the Office of Catholic Schools' *Policies & Guidelines Manual* will reflect the change.

Although this law will not be implemented until the fall of 2008, due to the controversy surrounding this ordinance, I believe it is important at this time to share with you the Diocese's position relative to this issue.

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted disease in the United States and a leading cause of cervical cancer. Catholic moral teaching holds that vaccinations as such are not morally objectionable. It should be noted, however, that the HPV vaccine has been studied for less than five years. There are some who contend the limited protective effect of the vaccine may not last to the age where young women are likely to be exposed to HPV; others maintain all girls and women will continue to need cervical cancer screening, including those who have been HPV vaccinated.

The Catholic Church teaches that immunizing against disease is an important and morally responsible action. We must also remember (and this is what is taught in our schools) the Church calls all people to live chaste lives, to abstain from sexual relations before marriage, and to remain faithful within marriage.

In view of these circumstances, the Diocese supports the premise that parents are the primary educators and caregivers of their children, and their discretion in deciding what health care measures are necessary and appropriate for their children must be fully respected by the state. The Diocese encourages all parents to consider both the benefits and the potential risks of the HPV vaccine before they make a decision about vaccination. As the Diocese receives any updates prior to the 2008 implementation date, we will share that information with you.

Sincerely,

Timothy J. McNiff, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools