

(S. B. 660)

(No. 91-2015)

(Approved June 19, 2015)

AN ACT

To declare the first week of August of each year as the “Human Papillomavirus Prevention and Awareness Week”; and for other related and necessary purposes.

STATEMENT OF MOTIVES

The Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a viral infection that can be sexually transmitted between people through tissue-to-tissue (skin-to-skin) contact. Most men and women can become infected. It is estimated that 80% of our population will be exposed to it at some point in their lives. In most cases, HPV goes away on its own, but when it does not, it can cause cervical, vaginal, and vulvar cancer in women, as well as anal cancer and genital warts in both men and women.

HPV infection is very common. Studies show that the Caribbean region ranks second in the world with the most diseases and deaths related to cancers associated with this virus. Fortunately, the same can be prevented by means of a vaccine, which has already been approved by the FDA with indications for treatment of both males and females ages 9 and up.

The most recent HPV-related research shows that approximately 3 in 4 people will suffer from genital warts after any type of genital contact with an affected individual. These warts can be flesh-colored, raised or flat, large or small, and appear as one or a cluster. Treatment can be painful, for it involves surgically removing or freezing the warts. However, even after treatment, 1 in 4 people will see them reappear within three months. Cancer, on the other hand, is harder to detect and can entail serious consequences.

Every day, 33 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer in the United States, which amounts to 12,000 women each year. This type of cancer is not passed on from mother to daughter. It is possible that many women who suffer from this type of cancer were exposed to the HPV that causes it during their adolescence or youth. Fifty percent (50%) of women diagnosed with cervical cancer are between 35 and 55 years old.

In addition to cervical cancer, anal cancer has seen its rate increase in both men and women. It is estimated that 1 in 600 people will be diagnosed with this type of cancer. Most of the cases are caused by certain strains of HPV. The virus can develop in the genital area and spread to the anus, with anal sex increasing this risk. No routine tests can detect anal cancer.

For these reasons, it is crucial to prevent HPV infections. There are currently two types of FDA-approved HPV vaccines. One protects children and teens from genital warts and anal cancer, as well as women from cervical, vulvar, and vaginal cancer. The other one protects women against cervical cancer. Both vaccines are administered in a 3-dose series.

Therefore, the main focus of this measure is to raise people's awareness of the virus and the viable options to reduce the risk of infection, as well as to promote the highest standards of health with regard to sexually transmitted diseases. To such end, the government and communities must join efforts to educate the population about preventing these types of infection. Such efforts can include furnishing information on the topic to schools in the Island in order to raise awareness among our youths, and holding community activities to disseminate knowledge about the virus and the tools to reduce the possibility of direct infection. Educating the people about the different manners in which they can become infected is the best way to establish control over the virus and to prevent its propagation and direct effects such as uterine, cervical, and anal cancer.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY OF PUERTO RICO:

Section 1.— The first week of August of every year is hereby declared as the “Human Papillomavirus Prevention and Awareness Week.”

Section 2.— At least ten (10) days prior to the first week of August of every year the Secretary of Health, in conjunction with the Secretary of State of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, shall issue a proclamation to raise awareness of and educate the Puerto Rican people about this medical condition.

Section 3.— The Secretary of Health, in coordination with the Secretary of State of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, as well as the departments, public entities, and municipalities of the Island, shall adopt the necessary measures to achieve the purposes of this Act by organizing and holding activities to observe and promote the first week of August of every year as the Human Papillomavirus Prevention and Awareness Week. Furthermore, such activities shall show the importance of greater awareness of the Human Papillomavirus among physicians, healthcare professionals, and the general public. Citizen and private entity participation in activities held during said week to further the cause for HPV awareness and prevention shall be promoted.

Section 4.— A copy of the proclamation shall be distributed to the media for publication and broadcast.

Section 5.— This Act shall take effect immediately after its approval.

CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify to the Secretary of State that the following **Act No. 91-2015 (S. B. 660)** of the **5th Regular Session** of the **17th Legislative Assembly of Puerto Rico**:

AN ACT to declare the first week of August of each year as the “Human Papillomavirus Prevention and Awareness Week”; and for other related and necessary purposes.

has been translated from Spanish to English and that the English version is correct.

In San Juan, Puerto Rico, on this 25th day of May, 2016.

Juan Luis Martínez Martínez
Director