

vaccine debate

To vaccinate or not? That is the question women, medical experts and lawmakers are struggling with when it comes to mandating that school-age girls be inoculated against a sexually transmitted virus that causes cervical cancer. So far 24 states and the District of Columbia have introduced this legislation, but many people are opposed to a law that would force girls to have an injection whose benefits are overblown and risks ignored.

The vaccine, which is called Gardasil, is federally recommended for girls aged 11 and 12 and is nearly 100 percent effective against the two strains of human papillomaviruses (HPV) that are linked with about 70 percent of cervical cancer. But opponents argue that the U.S. death rate from cervical cancer is quite low. "Even without Gardasil, only a fraction of a percent of women in the U.S. die of cervical cancer

each year, and most of those deaths could be prevented with routine Pap tests,"

notes Sigrid Fry-Revere, Ph.D., director of bioethics studies at the Cato Institute, a nonprofit public policy research foundation in Washington, D.C. Additionally, the vaccine hasn't been tested long enough to determine long-term consequences or how long protection lasts.

While 34 percent of women between the ages of 14 and 24 have one of the 30-some different strains of sexually transmitted HPVs, only 2.3 percent have one of the two strains linked to cervical cancer that the vaccine targets, notes women's health expert Christiane Northrup, M.D. "Vaccinating millions of girls and putting them at risk from a vaccine in order to prevent a few thousand deaths from cervical cancer makes no sense, since the body rids itself of most HPVs within a couple of years."

Even lawmakers in conservative Texas agree. Although the governor signed an executive order requiring girls to be vaccinated before sixth grade, legislators barred the mandate until at least 2011, nixing the plan to make Texas the first state with such a mandate.

—Katy Koontz



clean air in style

Standing just 13 inches tall and weighing a mere two pounds, the cute and portable AirPod, from Blueair, a Swedish luxury air-purifier manufacturer, combats allergy- and asthma-inducing dust with a HEPASilent filter. Eco-friendly technology prevents ozone emission and wasteful energy consumption. The ultramodern AirPod is slim enough to put on a desk and looks more like a high-end accessory than a humming howitzer. Choose from three designs: white-on-white branches, wavy blue stripes or black-and-white paisley with a gothic spin. \$99.99 at blueair.com. —AA

diagnosing repetitive stress injuries

If you suspect you have a repetitive stress injury (RSI) from, say, too much computer keyboarding, run—don't walk—to a physical therapist and immediately cut back on the offending activity. RSIs are difficult to assess since no diagnostic test exists, "but you don't want to add to the injury," says Ann E. Barr, Ph.D., associate professor of



natural ZZZ's

If counting sheep, listening to the ocean or popping a pill don't send you off to Slumberland, you may be at risk for more than just a groggy tomorrow. Chronic insomnia can lead to bigger problems. "Trouble sleeping is associated with serious health conditions, including congestive heart failure, high blood pressure, heart disease and even obesity," says Ronald Stram, M.D., director and founder of the Center for Integrative Health and Healing.

But when conventional methods don't work, what can you do? According to a survey undertaken by the National Center for Alternative and Complementary Medicine, 1.6 million Americans are forgoing prescription meds—which can be addictive—in favor of alternative



therapies to conquer sleeplessness.

One promising natural newcomer, Rescue Sleep, is made from the distilled essences of plants. New-agey as it may sound, it's actually a tried-and-true approach with a pedigree: It's made by Nelson's, the 140-year-old British natural-medicine manufacturer that brought the world the popular anxiety-relieving, plant-based Rescue Remedy. Stram explains that because this contains the "energetic imprint" of plants rather than bioactive herbs, it has no side effects and is especially effective for people who are losing sleep due to emotional disturbances, like anxiety or anger.

The plants used to make Rescue Sleep are Rock Rose (diminishes panic), White Chestnut (banishes repetitive thoughts) and Impatiens (alleviates edginess), and hopefully the non-habit-forming spray will send *you* sailing toward Lala-land. Rescue Sleep sells for \$10.95 at drugstore.com or your local health food store. —AA

physical therapy at Temple University and coauthor of a new study showing that a simple blood test might finally provide a way to detect the condition.

Such a test would solve an even bigger problem, since many insurance companies are hesitant to cover this condition—even though the U.S. Department of Labor cites 700,000 workers afflicted annually. RSIs result from low-force, repeated motions and can cause pain, numbness and loss of flexibility and strength in the muscles, tendons and nerves of the wrists, shoulders, hands, hips, knees or legs. There are hundreds of forms of RSIs; common ones include carpal tunnel, rotator cuff tendonitis and tennis and golfer's elbow.

In the study, researchers compared the blood of healthy sub-

jects to RSI sufferers and observed that the injured patients had high levels of a blood protein associated with inflammation. "We found that inflammation is part of the early development of RSI," says Barr. "We hope to eventually use a blood test to identify what is an acceptable amount of exertion—the amount that body tissues can tolerate before they become inflamed. We also hope to monitor the effects of treatment."

In the meantime, if you think you have an RSI, find a rehabilitation physician and lessen repetitive movements. Modify your workplace, take frequent breaks, and think Pilates—pay attention to posture, stretch often and do deep breathing exercises throughout the day to keep muscles relaxed.

—Andra Stanton