

Texas governor orders anti-cancer vaccine for girls

Move riles some conservatives

By Liz Austin Peterson
Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Bypassing the Legislature, Gov. Rick Perry issued an order yesterday making Texas the first state to require that schoolgirls be vaccinated against the sexually transmitted virus that causes cervical cancer.

By employing an executive order, Perry, a Republican, sidestepped opposition in the Legislature from conservatives and parents' rights groups who fear such a requirement would condone premarital sex and interfere with child-rearing.

Beginning in September 2008, girls entering the sixth grade will have to receive Gardasil, Merck & Co.'s new vaccine against strains of the human papillomavirus, or HPV.

Perry also directed state authorities to make the vaccine available free to 9- to 18-year-olds who are uninsured or whose insurance does not cover vaccines. He also ordered that Medicaid offer Gardasil to women ages 19 to 21.

Perry, a conservative Christian, has said the cervical cancer vaccine is no different from the one that protects children against polio.

"The HPV vaccine provides us with an incredible opportunity to effectively target and prevent cervical cancer," he said.

Merck is bankrolling efforts to pass state laws across the country mandating Gardasil for girls as young as 11 or 12. It doubled its lobbying budget in Texas and has funneled money through Women in Govern-



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DAWN RICHARDSON, Parents Requesting Open Vaccine Education

ment, an advocacy group made up of female state legislators around the country.

Perry has ties to Merck and Women in Government. One of the drug company's three lobbyists in Texas is Mike Toomey, Perry's former chief of staff. His current chief of staff's mother-in-law, Texas Republican state Rep. Dianne White Delisi, is a state director for Women in Government.

The governor also received \$6,000 from Merck's political action committee during his re-election campaign.

Legislative aides said they are looking for ways around the order.

"He's circumventing the will of the people," said Dawn Richardson, president of Parents Requesting Open Vaccine Education, a citizens' group.

Texas allows parents to opt out by filing an affidavit objecting to the vaccine for religious or philosophical reasons. Even with such provisions, however, conservative groups say such requirements are overly intrusive.

The federal government approved Gardasil in June, and a government advisory panel has recommended that all girls get the shots at 11 and 12, before they are likely to be sexually active.



TODAY, IN 1959
A plane crash near Clear Lake, Iowa, killed rock 'n' roll stars Buddy Holly, left, Ritchie Valens and J.P. "The Big Bopper" Richardson.