

Actress Marcia Cross Reveals Anal Cancer Was Linked to HPV and Husband's Throat Cancer [VIDEO]

By talking about her cancer, she hopes to help destigmatize it.

June 14, 2019 By Alicia Green

Last year, *Desperate Housewives* star Marcia Cross shared her [anal cancer](#) diagnosis with fans on social media. Now, the actress says doctors suspect that her cancer and her husband's [throat cancer](#) were connected to human papillomavirus (HPV), reports [CNN](#).

According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC), HPV is a common virus that can lead to cancer of the cervix, penis, vagina, vulva, anus and throat later in life.

Each year, an estimated 14 million Americans contract the virus, which is spread through sexual or skin-to-skin contact. What's more, [HPV](#) is linked to nearly 34,000 cases of cancer in women and men annually.

During a routine digital rectum exam about a year and a half ago, Cross's gynecologist discovered a cancerous mass on her anus. "I was so not thinking anything was wrong because I didn't have any symptoms," Cross shared during a recent episode of *CBS This Morning* (which can be viewed above). "And [my doctor] gave me an exam and came around and said, 'Well, I just want you to know, whatever it is it's curable. It was like 'What? What are you talking about?'"

Cross underwent six weeks of radiation and two weeks of chemotherapy. She relied on her friends, whom she calls her Anal Angels to help her get through treatment.

In 2009, her husband, Tom Mahoney, was diagnosed with throat cancer. With twin toddlers and a career to juggle, Cross found herself also caring for a sick partner. Today, both Cross and Mahoney are in remission. But she didn't know that the same type of HPV that likely triggered Mahoney's cancer could also cause anal cancer.

She's just glad to know that the vaccine Gardasil 9 can prevent nine different types of HPV, even in her 12-year-old twin daughters. (The CDC recommends that both boys and girls receive two doses of the HPV vaccine at ages 11 and 12. But the vaccine can be started as early as age 9. The goal of early vaccination is to protect children long before they are ever exposed to the virus.)

Recently, the Food and Drug Administration expanded the [approval](#) of Gardasil 9 from up to age 26 to up to age 45.

“I know that there are people who are ashamed,” Cross said. “You have cancer. Should you then also feel ashamed, like you did something bad because it took up residence in your anus?”

Cross has wholeheartedly embraced the word anus, saying it took a while before she got used to it. She hopes that by sharing her story she can help others feel more comfortable and confident in talking to their doctors about symptoms of anal cancer.

For related coverage, read [“A Cure for HPV? Not So Fast...”](#) and [“HPV Vaccination Rate Low Among At-Risk Individuals.”](#)

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