

Talking to your Patients about HPV Vaccine

Why should I talk to my patients about HPV vaccine?

Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) is a virus that can cause warts and cancer, particularly cancers of the genital area and of the oropharynx.¹ There are over 100 types of HPV, with 12 high-risk types that are oncogenic.¹

While most public awareness has been in regards to the link between HPV infection and cervical cancer, oropharyngeal cancer is also as common as cervical cancer.¹ The incidence rate for oropharyngeal cancers has been increasing significantly since the mid-1990s, particularly in men.¹ While the majority of oropharyngeal cancers are associated with tobacco and alcohol use, 25-35% of oropharyngeal cancers are attributed to HPV infections.¹ Those with a history of oral HPV-16 infection have a 15-200 fold increase in the risk of developing oropharyngeal cancer.²

While sexual contact is considered the main mode of transmission for HPV, evidence suggests any skin-to-skin or skin-to-mucosa contact, such as kissing and vertical transmission through childbirth, can also transmit HPV infections.²

How effective is the vaccine?

The HPV vaccines available in Canada have been shown to be highly effective in preventing HPV infection. Studies have already shown that HPV vaccination programs have led to reductions in precancerous cervical lesions.¹

The safety of HPV vaccines has been reviewed extensively, and the research shows that they are safe, well tolerated, and have side effects similar to other vaccines. The most common side effects of vaccines are soreness, swelling, itching, and redness at the injection site. The safety of all vaccines are assessed in Canada and around the world on an ongoing basis.¹

¹ Canadian Cancer Statistics Advisory Committee. Canadian Cancer Statistics 2016. Toronto, ON: Canadian Cancer Society; 2016.

² Royal College of Dental Surgeons of Ontario. HPV101: What Dentists Should Know, *Dispatch Magazine*, August/September 2014, Vol.28, No. 3, pages 42-43. Available at *Dispatch Magazine*, August/September 2014, Vol. 28, No. 3, pages 42-43. Available at "[HPV101: What Dentists Should Know](#)".

Who should get the HPV vaccine?

HPV vaccination prior to onset of sexual activity and exposure to HPV is recommended to maximize the benefit of the vaccine.³

Currently, HPV vaccines Gardasil® and Gardasil®9 are recommended by the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI)³ for:

- Girls and women from 9 to 26 years of age, including those who have had previous Pap test abnormalities, cervical cancer, or genital warts. It may also be administered to women 26 years of age and older at ongoing risk of exposure to HPV.
- Boys and men from 9 to 26 years of age. It may also be administered to men 26 years of age and older at ongoing risk of exposure to HPV.

Use of HPV vaccine Gardasil® and Gardasil®9 is NOT currently recommended by NACI for:

- Females and males under nine years of age.
- Pregnant women

How do Albertans access the HPV vaccine?

In Alberta, Gardasil® 9 is offered through the provincial routine vaccination program to all students in grade 6. If they did not receive the HPV vaccine in grade 6, they are offered HPV vaccine at their grade 9 immunizations and continue to be eligible for provincially-funded (no-cost) vaccine until the end of grade 12. Additionally, men 17-26 years of age who have sex with men, hematopoietic stem cell transplant recipients 9 years of age up to the end of grade 12, and solid organ transplant recipients 9 to 26 years of age are also eligible for provincially-funded vaccine.⁴ If they are not in one of the eligible groups, the HPV vaccine can be prescribed by a family doctor or a pharmacist.

³ Government of Canada. Human papillomavirus (HPV) <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/human-papillomavirus-hpv.html>

⁴ Alberta Health Services Immunization Program Standards Manual <https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/assets/info/hp/cdc/lf-hp-cdc-hpv-bio-pg-07-241.pdf>