

## Let's Talk About...

### Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) (and why it's important to get vaccinated)

#### What is Human Papilloma Virus?

Human papilloma virus (HPV) is a group of more than 100 different types of viruses, with some types that pose an increased risk for genital warts and certain types of cancer. HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the world today. Approximately 75% of sexually active Canadians will have at least one HPV infection in their lifetime.

While many HPV types will clear up on their own, at least 14 types of HPV may cause cancer. In women, HPV has been linked to cancer of the cervix, vulva, and vagina, and in men, cancer of the penis. In both men and women, HPV has been linked to cancer of the anus, mouth, and throat.

Infections from the most common cancer-causing types of HPV can be prevented with the HPV vaccine.

#### How does it spread?

HPV is highly contagious and can be spread by skin-to-skin contact in the genital area, or during genital, anal, or oral sex. Anyone who is sexually active is at risk for HPV. Both men and women can be infected with HPV.

#### What are the symptoms?

Many people who become infected with HPV will not show signs or symptoms, but may still be at a greater risk for developing certain types of cancer. Some people will develop genital warts, small bumps that can appear on or inside the sex organs. Genital warts will appear several weeks, months or even years after sexual contact, and are often the only visible sign that someone has an HPV infection. Genital warts are usually painless, but can sometimes cause itching or burning.

#### Is there a cure?

There is currently no cure for an HPV infection. Vaccines are an effective way to prevent HPV infection and HPV-related diseases.



HPV vaccine is recommended for the prevention of HPV types responsible for most genital warts and HPV-related cancers. These may include: cervical cancer, vulvar / vaginal cancer, genital warts, anal cancer, oropharyngeal cancer (cancer of the mouth or throat) and penile cancer, amongst other associated cancers and abnormal growths.

#### How can I protect myself from HPV and HPV-related disease?

- Abstinence of all sexual contact, even skin-to-skin contact without penetration, is the only way to completely avoid the HPV virus.
- Limiting your number of sexual partners and using a condom is also effective to reduce risk.

Note: condoms do not guarantee complete protection against HPV because the virus can be contracted through skin-to-skin contact beyond the covered area, but help to protect against other sexually transmitted infections.

- Vaccination has been shown to be up to 90% effective at preventing the HPV types responsible for most genital warts and HPV-related cancers.
- For women between the ages of 21-69 who have ever been sexually active, it is recommended that they have regular Pap tests. A Pap test will detect abnormal cells in the cervix that could lead to cervical cancer later in life. If you're unsure when you are due for your next Pap test, check your **Health Plan** in our health portal. Not a portal user? Register today at <https://portal.wcfht.ca/>



### Who should get vaccinated?



The HPV vaccine is recommended for females and males aged 9 to 26 years, and may be used in females over 26 years of age who have not previously been vaccinated or who have not completed the series.

HPV vaccination will also benefit people older than 26 years of age who are already sexually active, with or without previous pap abnormalities, cervical cancer, genital warts or HPV infection.

*HPV vaccine is not recommended for males/females under 9 years of age or pregnant women.*

**Note:** Providing the HPV vaccine in Grade 7 (when youth are normally 12 or 13 years of age) aligns with expert recommendations (from Canada's National Advisory Committee on Immunization) because this is the age when the benefits of the vaccine are maximized. Receiving the vaccine at this age – especially before becoming sexually active, is an investment in long-term health.

### What if I choose not to get vaccinated? Are there any risks?

For men and women who are sexually active, the risk of not getting vaccinated is the risk of getting HPV infection. Remember, it is estimated that 3 out of 4 sexually active Canadians will have at least one HPV infection in their lifetime, and as we know, many types of HPV may cause cancer.

The HPV vaccine itself is very safe, and is effective at preventing HPV. Vaccines, like any medication can have side effects. Mild side effects are possible, such as a sore arm from the shot, headache or tiredness, nausea, fever, or muscle and joint pain. Many people who get the HPV vaccine have no side effects at all. Check out the link "For more information about the vaccine," below!

### How much does the vaccination cost?

The cost of the vaccine varies, usually around \$600 for the complete set of doses, but may be covered by your health insurance plan.

Ontario now offers the vaccine free of charge to all boys and girls in Grade 7. The program is run through school-based clinics by local public health units. Students who are unable to begin or complete the HPV vaccine series in Grade 7 are eligible to catch-up missed doses through their local public health unit, free of charge until they finish Grade 12.

### **What if I don't know if I have been vaccinated in the past?**

Starting in the 2007-08 school year, grade 8 girls who attended school in Ontario may have been offered the vaccine.

Anyone who is unsure whether they received the HPV vaccine is encouraged to call Ottawa Public Health (613-580-6744) to request a copy of their immunization record. Once you receive this information, it is important that you provide your complete immunization record to the WCFHT so that we can update your chart.

You can check whether you have any other immunizations that are due by logging into the patient health portal: <https://portal.wcfht.ca/>

### **What's next?**

Students who are unable to begin or complete the HPV vaccine series in Grade 7 are eligible to catch-up missed doses through their local public health unit, free of charge until they finish Grade 12.

For patients who wish to receive the HPV vaccine and did not receive it at school, it is recommended that you send us a portal message to arrange a prescription. Your provider can submit a prescription to your pharmacy and the vaccine can be administered during an appointment in our nurse clinic.

### **For more information...**

From the experts:

<http://hpvinfo.ca/>

About the vaccine:

[http://www.merck.com/product/usa/pi\\_circulars/g/gardasil\\_9/gardasil\\_9\\_ppi.pdf](http://www.merck.com/product/usa/pi_circulars/g/gardasil_9/gardasil_9_ppi.pdf)

For teens:

[http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/hpv\\_vaccine\\_teens](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca/handouts/hpv_vaccine_teens)

About the immunization program in schools:

<http://health.gov.on.ca/en/ms/hpv/default.aspx>