



Information to Support Your Decision About HPV Immunization

This document is a print friendly copy of the content from the online [HPV Vaccine Decision Tool](#).

1. I want to learn more about human papillomavirus (HPV) and how it links to cancer or other health problems.

What is HPV?

HPV is a virus. It is a very common sexually transmitted infection that can cause genital warts and several types of cancer.

An HPV infection will often go away on its own but can become a long-term infection for some people. This can lead to cancer of the vagina, vulva, cervix, penis, anus, mouth or throat.

HPV causes almost all cervical cancers.

What cancers and health problems does HPV cause?

The most serious strains of HPV can cause several cancers. In Canada, HPV causes nearly:

- 100% of cervical cancers
- 90% of anal cancers
- 40-50% of penile cancers
- 40% of vaginal cancers
- 60-73% of head and neck cancers

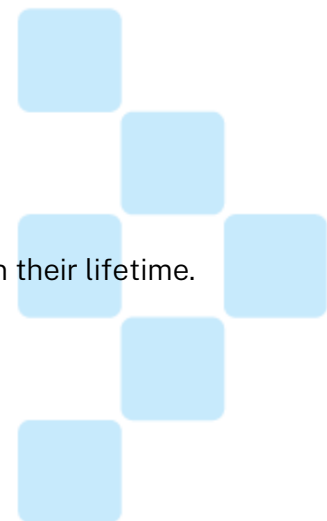
Other HPV strains cause 90% of all genital warts.

[Sources: 1, 2.](#)

How common are HPV infections?

75% of sexually active people will get at least one HPV infection in their lifetime.

[Source: 3](#)





How does someone know if they have HPV? What are the symptoms?

Most people have no symptoms and don't know if they have HPV. They can infect others without realizing it.

Some people with HPV will develop genital warts. These are flesh-coloured bumps that may be flat or look like cauliflower. They don't usually hurt and do not turn into cancer. They can be treated by a healthcare provider.

Most people clear HPV within two years. Approximately 10% of all HPV infections do not go away on their own. These infections can lead to pre-cancerous cells and several types of cancer.

How does someone get HPV?

HPV spreads by sexual contact or skin-to-skin contact in the mouth and genital areas.

A pregnant person can spread HPV to their baby during vaginal childbirth.

HPV can spread even if you have no symptoms, or you cannot see any warts.

HPV risk is highest soon after sexual activity begins. Delaying the start of sexual activity, adopting safer sexual practices (such as using barrier methods like condoms), and limiting the number of sexual partners can help lower HPV risk.

Can HPV infection be prevented without the vaccine?

The HPV vaccine is the best way to protect against nine of the most common and harmful HPV virus strains that are linked to several cancers and genital warts.

When a person is sexually active, they can reduce their risk by using barrier methods, such as condoms. This does not eliminate the risk of HPV transmission as HPV can still be passed through contact with skin not covered by a barrier.

Can HPV infection be treated?

There is no treatment to eliminate HPV itself. However, health problems caused by HPV can often be treated or managed.

For example, genital warts can be treated in a clinic or healthcare provider's office.

Early detection of pre-cancerous cells or cancers linked to HPV can improve outcomes in most cases.



2. I want to learn more about the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine.

What is the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine (formally called the HPV-9 vaccine) protects against nine of the most common and harmful HPV strains.

Specifically, this vaccine protects against:

1. **Seven strains** of HPV that cause cancer. Together, these strains cause about 90% of cervical cancers and high proportions of cancers of the vagina, vulva, anus, penis, mouth and throat.
2. **Two strains** of HPV that cause about 90% of genital warts cases.

How well does the HPV vaccine work?

When the vaccine is given according to the recommended immunization schedule, the HPV vaccine is over 95% effective at preventing HPV infections that can cause cervical cancer, other cancers and genital warts.

HPV vaccine works best when immunization occurs before sexual activity begins. Evidence suggests that HPV immunization is most effective when completed between the ages of 9 and 14 years.

[Sources: 3, 4](#)

What does the HPV vaccine help prevent?

Studies in countries with HPV vaccine programs have shown that the vaccine prevents cancer-causing HPV infections, cervical pre-cancers, and genital warts.

People who are immunized are also less likely to get HPV and spread it to others.

How many doses are recommended?

Children are offered HPV immunization in Grade 6. Please visit Primary Care Alberta's [Human papillomavirus \(HPV-9\) vaccine](#) webpage to learn more about the number of doses and immunization scheduling.

Is the HPV vaccine safe?

Yes. Vaccines approved for use in Canada meet very strict standards for safety and effectiveness. The HPV vaccine was well studied in clinical trials prior to its introduction and was proven to be safe and effective.



There is continuous monitoring of the safety of all vaccines in Canada. The results from this monitoring continue to demonstrate that the HPV vaccine is safe for children, youth, and adults.

[Sources: 5,6](#)

Does the HPV vaccine have side effects?

The HPV vaccine can have side effects, but they tend to be mild and short lasting.

Common side effects may include:

- redness where you had the needle that may look red on lighter skin or purple on darker skin
- swelling, a hard spot, bruising, bleeding, itching, or feeling sore at the site where the needle was given
- a headache
- feeling dizzy
- a fever
- feeling tired
- body aches
- feeling sick to your stomach (nausea), stomach pain, or loose stool (diarrhea)
- a sore throat, cough, and runny nose

It is important to stay at the clinic for 15 minutes after your vaccine. Some people may have a rare but serious allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. If anaphylaxis happens, you will get medicine to treat the symptoms.

It is rare to have a serious side effect after a vaccine. Call Health Link at 811 to report any serious or unusual side effects.

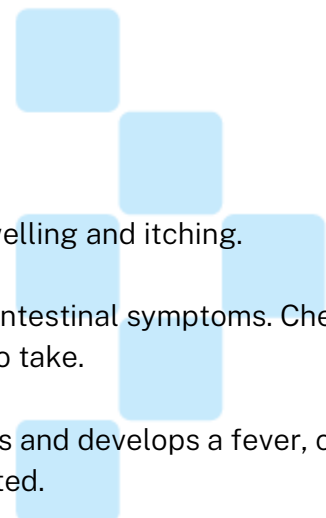
[Source: 2](#)

How can I manage the side effects?

A cool, wet cloth applied to the injection site will help with pain, swelling and itching.

Over-the-counter medication can help with fever, pain and gastro-intestinal symptoms. Check with a healthcare provider about what type of medicine and dose to take.

If the person receiving the vaccine has underlying health conditions and develops a fever, call their healthcare provider even if you think the fever is vaccine related.





Does the HPV vaccine impact fertility?

Extensive research has found no evidence linking the HPV vaccine to infertility.

Some of the cancers caused by HPV infection, which the vaccine protects against, can cause fertility issues.

[Sources: 7,8](#)

Who may not be able to get the HPV vaccine?

You may not be able to get the HPV vaccine if:

- You have an allergy to any part of the HPV vaccine. Be sure to tell your healthcare provider about any allergies you may have.
- You had a severe (serious) or unusual side effect after the HPV vaccine or one like it.

If either of these apply, check with your healthcare provider before you get the HPV vaccine.

You can get the HPV vaccine if you have a mild illness such as a cold or fever. However, it is best to stay home until you are feeling better to prevent spreading your illness to others.

What ingredients are in the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine is an inactivated vaccine made in a lab. It contains non-infectious HPV-like particles derived from HPV types 6, 11, 16, 18, 31, 33, 45, 52, and 58.

The HPV vaccine does not contain any live virus strains and cannot cause HPV infection or any disease caused by HPV. It does not contain preservatives, like mercury, thimerosal, or antibiotics.

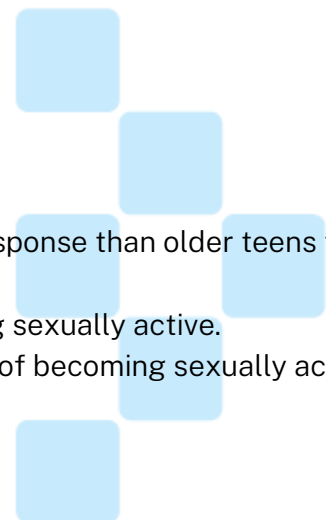
[Source: 9](#)

Why is the HPV vaccine given at a young age?

It is best to get the HPV vaccine at a young age because:

- Research has found that preteens have a better immune response than older teens to the HPV vaccine.
- The vaccine is most effective if completed before becoming sexually active.
- The risk of HPV infection is highest within two to five years of becoming sexually active.

[Sources: 4, 5](#)





Does receiving the HPV vaccine encourage earlier sexual activity?

There is no evidence to support earlier or increased sexual activity among children and youth who receive the HPV vaccine.

There is also no difference in unsafe sexual behaviour, rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), or pregnancy rates between those immunized and non-immunized

[Sources: 7, 10, 11, 12](#)

Do I still need to screen for cervical cancer if I have been immunized?

Yes. The HPV vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer. Therefore, women and people with a cervix should still get screened for cervical cancer regularly, even if they have received the HPV vaccine.

For more information about cervical cancer screening, please visit [Cervical - Screening For Life | Screening For Life](#).

3. I want to learn more about how to get immunized for human papillomavirus (HPV).

Who can get the HPV vaccine and where can someone be immunized?

For individuals under 18 years:

Children will be eligible for HPV immunization starting in Grade 6 through the Public Health School Immunization Program. Children who did not get HPV vaccine in Grade 6, can get it in Grade 9.

Parents and guardians need to provide consent for children under age 18 years. Parents and guardians will get an information package that includes a consent form. Parents or Guardians who want their child to get the vaccine in school, must complete and sign the consent form and return it according to the instructions provided.

In certain cases, a mature minor (under age 18 years) may be able to give their own consent at a local public health or community health centre. More information can be found [here](#).

An appointment may be booked at a local public health or community health centre if the individual:

- Is in Grades 7-8 or 10-12.



- Attends school outside of an in-school environment, such as homeschool or online education.

To learn more or to book HPV immunization at a local public health or community health centre:

- In the Calgary area, call Health Link at 811.
- In the Edmonton area, call Health Link at 811 or contact your local public health or community health centre.
- In all other areas, contact your local public health or community health centre.

Click [here](#) to find your local public health or community health centre.

For individuals between 18 and 26 years:

Individuals over 18 years can get the vaccine, free of charge, up to and including age 26 years at a local public health or community health centre.

To learn more or to book HPV immunization at a local public health or community health centre:

- In the Calgary area, call Health Link at 811.
- In the Edmonton area, call Health Link at 811 or contact your local public health or community health centre.
- In all other areas, contact your local public health or community health centre.

Click [here](#) to find your local public health or community health centre.

While the free provincial program is not available to those 27 years and older, the vaccine may be purchased and administered through a pharmacy or other healthcare provider. They can check with their health insurance provider to see if their plan covers the cost.

For individuals 27 years and older:

HPV immunization is available for individuals 27 years and older.

While the free provincial program is not available to those 27 years and older, the vaccine may be purchased and administered through a pharmacy or other healthcare provider. Individuals can check with their health insurance provider to see if their plan covers the cost.

Individuals can contact a healthcare provider, pharmacist, a private immunization clinic, or call Health Link at 811 to learn more. Click [here](#) to find healthcare provider nearby.

When should HPV immunization occur?

Evidence suggests that HPV immunization is most effective when completed between the ages of 9 and 14 years.



Research has found that preteens have a better immune response than older teens to the HPV vaccine.

Also, the vaccine is most effective if completed before becoming sexually active.

This is why it is routinely offered to Grade 6 students in Alberta schools.

However, even if you're already sexually active, it's not too late. The HPV vaccine protects against several strains of HPV, so you may still get protection from HPV types you haven't been exposed to yet. This will help reduce the risk of genital warts and several types of cancer.

[Sources: 3, 4](#)

How does consent for HPV immunization work?

In Alberta, parents or guardians provide consent for children under 18 years to be immunized.

For school-based immunization programs, a consent form is sent home with information about the vaccine. If you want your child to get the vaccine in school, you must complete and sign the consent form and return it according to the instructions provided.

In certain cases, a mature minor (under 18 years) can provide consent for HPV immunization at a local public health or community health centre. More information can be found [here](#).

How much does the HPV vaccine cost?

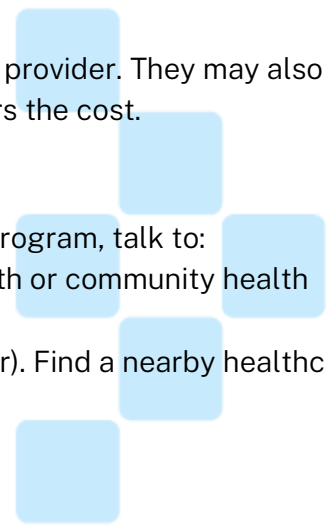
For eligible Albertans, the HPV vaccine is free of charge.

Albertans who are not eligible can discuss costs with their vaccine provider. They may also check with their health insurance provider to see if their plan covers the cost.

Who can I speak with to learn more?

If you have questions about the HPV vaccine or the immunization program, talk to:

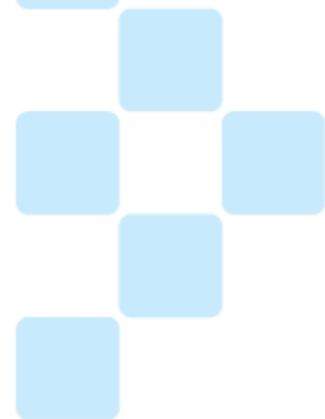
- A Public Health Nurse (PHN) through your local public health or community health centre. Find a nearby location [here](#).
- Your healthcare provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner). Find a nearby healthcare provider [here](#).
- A pharmacist
- Health Link at 811





Sources:

1. [Human papillomavirus \(HPV\): Symptoms and treatment - Canada.ca](#)
2. [07.240 Human papillomavirus \(HPV\) Vaccine Information Sheet](#)
3. [Human papillomavirus \(HPV\) vaccines: Canadian Immunization Guide - Canada.ca](#)
4. [Ellingson, M. K., Sheikha, H., Nyhan, K., Oliveira, C. R., & Niccolai, L. M. \(2023\). Human papillomavirus vaccine effectiveness by age at vaccination: A systematic review. Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics, 19\(2\).](#)
5. [Updated Recommendations on Human papillomavirus \(HPV\) Vaccines](#)
6. [Vaccine safety and pharmacovigilance: Canadian Immunization Guide - Canada.ca](#)
7. [Henschke N, Bergman H, Buckley BS, Crosbie EJ, Dwan K, Golder SP, Kyrgiou M, Loke YK, McIntosh HM, Probyn K, Villanueva G, Morrison J. Effects of Human papillomavirus \(HPV\) vaccination programmes on community rates of HPV-related disease and harms from vaccination. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews 2025, Issue 11. Art. No.: CD015363. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD015363.pub2.](#)
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10. [Ogilvie G, Phan F, Pedersen H, Dobson SR, Naus M, Saewyc EM. \(2018\). Population-level sexual behaviours in adolescent girls before and after introduction of the Human papillomavirus vaccine \(2003–2013\). Canadian Medical Association Journal. 190\(41\): E1221-E1226.](#)
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12. [Jena AB, Goldman DP, Seabury SA. Incidence of sexually transmitted infections after Human papillomavirus vaccination among adolescent females. JAMA Intern Med. 2015 April 1;175\(4\):617-23.](#)





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