

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccination Program for Grade 8 Females: What you need to know

What is Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a common virus with more than 100 types. Some types of HPV can lead to cancer of the cervix in women. Most HPV infections can be prevented with a vaccine.

How is HPV spread?

HPV is most commonly spread during sexual activity by skin-to-skin contact with an infected person.

What are the symptoms of HPV?

Most people never get symptoms and may not know they have been infected with HPV but they still carry the virus and can infect others. Depending on the type of HPV infection, the infected individual may develop cervical abnormalities, cervical cancer, other genital cancers or genital warts.

What can happen when you get HPV?

Most adults in Canada will be infected with HPV at some point in their lifetime. The body's immune system usually gets rid of the virus on its own. In some people, the virus can lead to cervical cancer. There are 500 women diagnosed with cervical cancer and 140 deaths each year in Ontario.

How can I help protect my child from HPV?

Get your child vaccinated. The vaccine can prevent infection against four types – type 6, 11, 16 and 18. In Canada, strains 16 and 18 cause 70% of cervical cancer. Strains 6 and 11 cause about 90% of genital warts.

How is the HPV vaccine given?

The vaccine is given as a needle in the arm. Three doses of the HPV vaccine are required for protection. The three doses of the vaccine are given within the school year. Usually, the second dose is 2 months after the first dose and the third dose is 6 months after the first dose.

Who should get the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine has been approved for females aged 9 to 26. It is most effective when given before sexual activity begins. The provincial government is funding the HPV vaccine at no cost to all girls in Grade 8 through school clinics.

Who should not get the HPV vaccine?

Your daughter should not get the HPV vaccine if she

- has already been fully vaccinated with the HPV vaccine;
- has had a serious reaction to a previous dose of the HPV vaccine;
- has a yeast allergy or an allergy to a vaccine component; and
- is pregnant.

It is not recommended that she receive the vaccine if she has a fever or anything more serious than a minor cold.

Are there side effects from the vaccine?

The HPV vaccine is safe and approved for use in Canada for females ages 9 to 26 years. The HPV vaccine has similar side effects to most other available vaccines. These side effects include redness, tenderness and swelling of the injection site and, less commonly, fever, nausea, dizziness and headache. Rare reactions that occur within 15 days of the vaccination should be reported to your doctor or local health unit. These reactions include trouble with breathing, swelling of the face or mouth, a fever over 39°C, hives or rashes. Public health nurses administer the vaccine and are present at school clinics at all times. They are trained to handle severe reactions.

How good is the vaccine?

The vaccine is almost 100% effective against the four HPV types that the vaccine protects against. Studies have shown good protection for five years after vaccination. There is no risk of getting an HPV infection from the vaccine, since the vaccine does not contain live virus.

Other important things you should know about the HPV vaccine

Although the vaccine provides a high degree of protection against HPV, it is not a replacement for cervical cancer screening. Regular cervical cancer screening, combined with the vaccine, provides the best protection against cervical cancer.

A booster shot may be required later on in life. The vaccine is not currently licensed for males.

If I have a daughter who is not in Grade 8, can she get the vaccine too?

The Ontario government is funding the HPV vaccine at no cost to all females in grade 8 through school clinics. All other females aged 9 to 26 can see their doctor and pay to get the vaccine. The three doses cost approximately \$400 in total.

Before giving the HPV vaccine, public health nurses will ask your child some questions about:

- your child's health on that day;
- your child's general health status;
- any allergies to vaccines or medications;
- any medications that your child is taking;
- any problems with getting vaccines in the past; and
- any previous HPV vaccination.

On the day your child gets vaccinated:

- Have her wear a short sleeve shirt to make vaccination easier; and
- have her eat a good breakfast or lunch before the clinic.

If your child has already received the HPV vaccine, please call your local Public Health Unit to update your child's records or fill out the information in the attached consent form.

Want to learn more?

For more information:

- Call INFOline 1-866-559-4598 (TTY 1-800-387-5559)
- Visit www.hpvontario.ca
- Contact your local Public Health Unit