

# Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine

## Communicable Disease Control – Factsheet

Immunization has saved more lives in Canada in the last 50 years than any other medical intervention. Vaccines help your immune system to recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause diseases.

### What is human papillomavirus?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a virus that can infect many parts of the body in both men and women. There are over 100 different types of HPV. Some types are low-risk while others are high-risk.

Some low-risk types of HPV can develop into warts that are generally not harmful. These include common skin warts and plantar warts (warts on the soles of the feet). Other low-risk types can cause genital warts which are single or multiple growths or bumps that look like small cauliflowers. Genital warts can appear weeks or months after sexual contact with an infected partner, even if the infected partner has no signs of genital warts.

While most HPV infections go away over time with no treatment, some do not and can go on to cause cancer. There are 15 known types of HPV that are high risk of causing growths that can lead to cancer, as well as cancer of the cervix, vagina, vulva, penis, anus, throat and mouth.

HPV can cause changes in the cells on the cervix, called cervical dysplasia (abnormal cells). Over time, if these changes remain and are not treated, cancer of the cervix can develop. In Manitoba, approximately 45 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer each year, and about 15 women die annually from the disease.

### What is the HPV Vaccine?

There are two HPV vaccines that are available for use in Canada. When either vaccine is given prior to HPV exposure, it is highly effective in preventing infection from two of the high-risk HPV types (Type 16 and Type 18), which account for about 70% of cervical cancers. One of the two HPV vaccines (Gardasil®) also provides protection against two low-risk HPV types (Type 6 and Type 11), which cause about 90% of all genital warts.

**The vaccine does not treat existing HPV infections.**

### How is the virus transmitted?

HPV is estimated to be one of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in Canada and around the world. Most people who are sexually active will have at least one HPV infection in their lifetime. People in their late teens or early 20s are the age groups most commonly infected with HPV.

HPV infections can occur without any symptoms; it is easy for people who are infected to pass it onto others without knowing it. It is possible to have more than one type of HPV at a time. A person can have HPV even if years have passed since he or she had sexual contact with an infected person.

HPV can be spread during genital contact and oral sex with a person who is already infected. Genital contact includes skin-to-skin contact with the vagina, vulva (the outside parts of a woman's genitals), penis, scrotum or anus. Any person who has genital contact or oral sex with an infected person can get the virus. Using condoms may lower the risk of getting HPV and developing HPV-related diseases (e.g. genital warts and cervical cancer). To be most effective, they should be used with every sex act, from start to finish. However, HPV can infect areas that are not covered by a condom; therefore, condoms may not fully protect against HPV.

### Who is at increased risk?

It is especially important for people to get immunized if they have one or more of the following factors that put a person at increased risk of getting HPV:

- Early onset of sexual activity
- Multiple sexual partners
- A previous STI
- Adolescent pregnancy
- An immune system weakened by disease or medical treatment
- Previous abnormal pap tests
- Family history of HPV-associated cancers

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## Why should people get the HPV vaccine?

Immunization is the best way to protect against HPV.

When you are immunized, you also help protect others because someone who is immunized is less likely to spread infection.

## Who should get the HPV vaccine?

The vaccine is most effective when it is given before a person is sexually active; however, you can still benefit from getting the vaccine even after engaging in sexual activity.

Talk to your doctor or public health nurse to see if you or your child is eligible to receive the HPV vaccine free-of-charge as part of the recommended immunization schedule.

Or visit:

**Manitoba Public Health website**

[www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/index.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/publichealth/index.html)

## Who should NOT get the HPV vaccine?

Pregnant women.

Females under the age of nine and over the age of 45.

Males under the age of nine and over the age of 26 (dependent on the type of HPV vaccine given).

Anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of the HPV vaccine, or to any of the contents of the vaccine (e.g. yeast).

Anyone who has a high fever should not be immunized. But the vaccine can still be given if the illness is mild, like a cold.

## Possible side-effects of the HPV vaccine

Vaccines are known to be very safe. It is much safer for your child to get the vaccine than to get HPV.

Common reactions to the vaccine include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. Some people may have fever, nausea, dizziness, headache, or an upset stomach. Acetaminophen (Tylenol® or Tempra®) can be given for fever or soreness.

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**ASA (Aspirin®) should NEVER be given to children because it can cause a severe liver and brain disease called Reye's Syndrome.**

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It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is a rare possibility of a severe allergic reaction. This can include hives, difficulty

breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this happens after you leave the clinic, **call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department for immediate treatment.**

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**Report any serious or unexpected side effects to a public health nurse or doctor.**

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**Since the vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that cause cancer, women who receive the vaccine and become sexually active should have regular Pap tests.**

## Your record of protection

Make sure your doctor or public health nurse updates your own, or your child's, immunization record card, after you receive an immunization. Keep the card in a safe place!

Information about the immunizations you or your children receive may be recorded in the Manitoba Immunization Monitoring System (MIMS). This computerized database allows your doctor, your child's doctor or your public health nurse to find out what immunizations you or your child have had or need to have. Information collected in MIMS may be used to produce immunization records, or notify you or your doctor if someone has missed a particular immunization. Manitoba Health may use the information to monitor how well different vaccines work in preventing disease. If you need information on the immunizations that you or your child has received, contact your doctor, your local public health unit or nursing station.

## For more information on the HPV vaccine:

Talk to your doctor or public health nurse.

Call Health Links – Info Santé in Winnipeg at 204-788-8200; toll-free elsewhere in Manitoba 1-888-315-9257.

For national recommendations, visit the **Public Health Agency of Canada website** [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/index-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/im/index-eng.php)

Or visit:

**Canadian Pediatric Society website**  
[www.cps.ca](http://www.cps.ca)

**Sexuality Education Resource Centre website**  
[www.serc.mb.ca/SERC/](http://www.serc.mb.ca/SERC/)

**CancerCare Manitoba website**  
[www.cancercare.mb.ca/home/](http://www.cancercare.mb.ca/home/)