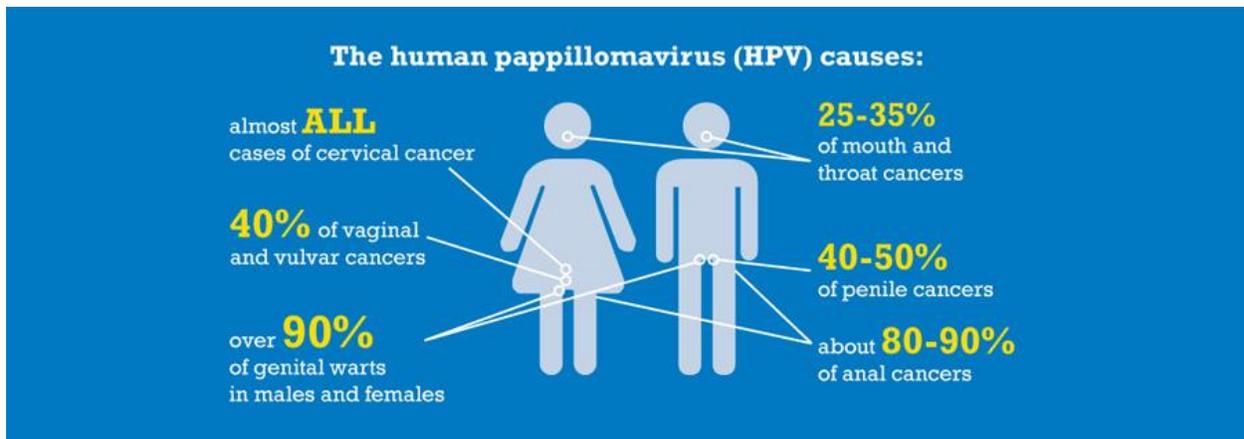


HPV VACCINES – FAQ and Advocacy Update

What is Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and Who is Affected?

HPV is one of the most prevalent sexually transmitted infections (STI) and up to 75% of Canadians will have it at some point in their life. Most will clear the infection on their own, but some will not, leading to complications. In BC alone, each year:

- 175-200 women will get cervical cancer and 50 women will die from the disease
- 6,000 women will develop high risk changes to the cervix which are precancerous
- Over 500,000 women will undergo Pap tests and over 20,000 will need further follow-up to stop cancer of the cervix from developing
- 110 people will get anal cancer and 20 will die from the disease
- 5,500 people will develop genital warts



How Do You Prevent HPV?

HPV is very contagious and can be passed through skin-to-skin contact. Using condoms can help prevent STI transmission, but not HPV. Getting the HPV vaccine can protect against the most problematic strains of HPV.

Cervarix® (HPV2) and Gardasil®9 (HPV9) vaccines protect against 2 types of HPV that cause about 70% of cases of cervical cancer and 80% of cases of anal cancer. The HPV9 vaccine protects against 5 additional types of HPV that cause 15% to 20% of cervical cancers and 11% of anal cancers in women and 4% in

men. The HPV9 vaccine also protects against 2 types of HPV that cause about 90% of cases of genital warts.

It is important to note that neither vaccine is a treatment or cure for existing HPV infection. However, even if you have been infected with HPV, getting vaccinated will protect you from getting the other commonly identified HPV types that you have not been infected with.

PAN's Advocacy Work for HPV Vaccine Access

PAN and many others have been advocating for greater access since June 2016 – especially for those show to be at greater risk due to weak immune systems or engaging in anal sex. Since then, the BC government has extended the HPV vaccination program to both people living with HIV and men who have sex with men (MSM), up to the age of 26, and in September 2017 they began to offer it to boys as well as girls in Grade 6.

What still needs to be done?

As awareness, stigma and cost can all be factors; hard-to-reach populations are least likely to take advantage of the vaccinations. These include refugees and new Canadians, persons who use injection drugs, inmates in correctional facilities, men who have sex with men, vulnerable youth, sex-trade workers, those with mental health issues, and Aboriginal people.

Also while the effects of HPV disproportionately affect women, it is common in both sexes. HPV is so pervasive because many people never know they are infected and pass it on. As well as being at risk of various cancers and genital warts, men are also a source of infection for women so to more rapidly reduce the spread of HPV, vaccinating men would be beneficial.

In terms of advocacy, increasing access to the free HPV9 vaccine for hard-to-reach populations and males born in 1994 or later, would be valuable.

Who is Eligible for the Free HPV Vaccine??

The HPV9 vaccine is provided free to girls and boys in grade 6. Females born in 1994 or later who were not immunized in the school-based program, or did not complete their vaccine series, can also get the HPV9 vaccine. The HPV9 vaccine is also provided free to individuals 9 to 26 years of age who are:

- Living with HIV
- Transgender
- Males who have sex with males, including those who may not yet be sexually active and are questioning their sexual orientation
- Males who are street involved

Other males eligible for the HPV9 vaccine include those:

- 9 to 18 years of age in the care of the Ministry of Children and Family Development
- In youth custody services centres

Who should access it, but would have to pay?

Unless mentioned above, the HPV9 vaccine is recommended for the following individuals:

- Women 45 years of age and younger born prior to 1994
- Boys and men 9 to 26 years of age
- Men 27 years of age and older who have sex with men

Those not eligible for free HPV vaccine can purchase it at most pharmacies and travel clinics, although they may require a prescription. If you have an extended health insurance plan that covers the cost of your vaccination, you will need a prescription from your doctor.

Why target Grade 6 children with the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine works best when it is given before any kind of sexual activity begins (before any exposure to HPV and because preteens have a better immune response to the vaccine than older teens). The vaccine is still recommended for those who are already sexually active. This is because they may not have been infected with HPV during previous sexual activity, and they are unlikely to be infected with all of the types of HPV contained in the vaccine. The vaccines prevent new infection but do not clear an existing infection.

HPV vaccine over age 26 – is it worth it?

The older you are the less likely you will get the full protection, as the risk increases with age that you have already been exposed. Women over the age of 26 who are most likely to benefit would never have had an abnormal Pap smear, have no history of Chlamydia, and have less than three lifetime sex partners. However, 45% of women between the ages of 30 and 39 with a history of high-grade dysplasia will still be negative for HPV 16 and 18 and so almost half will get protection from the HPV vaccine. If you want to eradicate the virus, getting as many people covered as possible is the way to go. Given the new vaccine covers nine types of HPV there is a greater chance that more women over the age of 26, regardless of sexual history, will get some protection, but whether it will be worth the cost is an individual decision. Men over the age of 26 may still benefit from vaccination, as they may not have acquired all the strains covered by the vaccine.

Is the HPV vaccine safe?

The HPV vaccine is safe. Vaccines are approved for use in Canada only if they meet very strict standards for safety and effectiveness. The HPV vaccine was well studied in clinical trials and was not approved in Canada until the clinical studies showed that it was safe and effective. Since the vaccine was approved for use, hundreds of millions of doses of HPV vaccine have been distributed worldwide. Vaccine safety monitoring has continued to show that the HPV vaccine is safe.

Should anyone NOT get the vaccine?

The HPV vaccine is not recommended for use in pregnancy because data on HPV vaccination in pregnancy is limited. However, if a pregnant woman happens to receive the HPV vaccine, it is important to note that the vaccine has not been shown to cause any harm to the baby.

PAN gratefully acknowledges the support of Merck over the past fiscal year.

How many doses of the HPV vaccine are required, and what is the cost?

The HPV vaccines are given as either 2 or 3 doses over a 6-month period. Children who start a series when 9 to 14 years of age need 2 doses given at least 6 months apart. People who start a series when 15 years of age and older and those with a weakened immune system need 3 doses. The cost in Canada is typically \$540 for the normal 3 doses.

What are the benefits of the HPV vaccines?

In women who have never been infected with HPV, the vaccines prevent almost 100% of cases of cervical cancer caused by the HPV types covered by the vaccines.

The HPV9 vaccine also prevents about:

- 78% of cases of anal cancers in men caused by the two main types of HPV
- 90% to 100% of cases of genital warts in men and women caused by 2 other types of HPV

Experts predict that early protection from the HPV vaccine will last for at least 15 years and is probably lifelong.

Why is the HPV vaccine needed if Pap tests can detect cervical cancer?

Pap tests are one of the most effective cancer screening tests - they can detect abnormal cells and precancerous changes before they progress to cancer. But the HPV vaccine actually prevents cancer in the first place. Further Pap tests are not perfect and not all women get tested as often as they should.

Do I still need Pap tests after I get the HPV vaccine?

Yes. Sexually active women of all ages will still need to get Pap tests after they've been vaccinated. While the HPV vaccine prevents infection with the two types of HPV that cause most cases of cervical cancers, the vaccine does not protect against all the types of HPV that cause cervical cancer.

Does condom use prevent HPV?

Consistent condom use has been shown to reduce the risk of acquiring HPV as well as preventing other sexually transmitted infections such as HIV and gonorrhoea. However, condoms do not completely cover all skin in the genital area and so cannot offer complete protection against HPV transmission.

Further resources

[BC Centre for Disease Control](#)

www.hpv.org.nz/hpv-men

[HPVInfo.Ca](#)

www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2334/14/3861

[Immunize BC](#)