



Shawn Haggerty
President

Teresa Magee
Secretary-Treasurer

Betty Pardy
Recorder

HPV VACCINE

Did you know that the human papillomavirus, or HPV for short, is among the most common sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) in Canada? HPVs can lead to cervical cancer and skin lesions (such as warts). Luckily, there are two vaccines available to help prevent the types of HPV that are responsible for approximately 70% of cervical cancers.

HPV is a wide-ranging virus, with low and high risk classified types. Although high-risk strains are associated with cancer, the development of an HPV cancer is still rare. HPV is sometimes called the “silent infection” as a person may not know they have an HPV until they are screened or develop genital warts. Of



course, not being able to see a virus doesn't make it any less dangerous. The Government of Canada estimates as many as three-quarters of sexually active adults will have at least one HPV infection in their lifetime. Many people with healthy immune systems will simply clear the infection from their body, with a small amount going on to develop cancer.

DID YOU KNOW?



The vaccine is effective in preventing the types of HPV that are responsible for 70 per cent of cervical cancer.

Since HPV is a sexually transmitted disease, many people think using condoms is enough. While the use of condoms consistently and properly is always a good idea and indeed reduces the chances of getting or passing along an HPV, it does not eliminate it completely.

Two HPV vaccines are authorized for use in Canada: Gardasil and Cervarix. Each of these vaccines protects against major types of cervical cancer-causing HPV types. Your health care professional can discuss your options for vaccinations. Gardasil is approved for both males and females aged 9 to 26, while Cervarix is approved only for females.

The medicine is given in three separate doses over the course of six months. Although immunization is

HPV VACCINE IN ONTARIO

very effective, women should still be screened for cervical cancer and have regular Pap tests.

Since 2007, Ontario grade 8 females have had free vaccinations for HPV at school. The program has been highly successful in vaccinating thousands of young women. But what about men?

Males can also be infected with HPV, but at the time of the program's implementation, the vaccine wasn't yet approved for their use. In 2010, Health Canada approved HPV vaccination for young men aged 9 to 26. The government of Ontario is still conducting analysis before they expand the vaccination program. In the meantime, males in this age bracket – as well as any females who are not in grade 8 – can obtain the vaccination from their doctor.



In Ontario, there are approximately 500 females diagnosed with cervical cancer and 140 deaths each year.

Some benefits of the HPV vaccination include (from Cancer Care Ontario):

- HPV vaccine is an important advance in preventing HPV infections and genital warts.
- If received before possible exposure to HPV through sexual contact, the vaccine protects against two of the many high-risk types of HPV (16 and 18), which are responsible for 70% of cervical cancer cases.
- The vaccine protects against two low-risk HPV types (6 and 11) that are associated with 90% of genital warts.
- The vaccine is ideally given before first sexual activity, but can also be given after first sexual activity since it is rare for a woman to be infected with all four HPV types included in the vaccine.
- The vaccine offers protection for at least five years.
- The vaccine is safe and well tolerated. Few side effects have been reported, e.g., mild pain, redness, itching or swelling where the shot was given.
- The vaccine is given as a shot in the arm, easily administered by a doctor or nurse.
- You cannot get HPV infection from the vaccine. It is not live and does not contain HPV; it contains virus-like particles.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Source: Health Canada



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