

Human Papillomavirus Information for Patients

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

Effective September 2016, Ontario will offer publicly funded HPV vaccine to men who have sex with men (MSM). Eligible individuals include people who are 26 years of age or younger who identify as gay, bisexual, as well as other MSM including some trans people.

What is HPV?

HPV is very common virus worldwide that can lead to cancer. HPV is spread during sexual activity involving intimate skin-to-skin contact with an infected person. Most people with HPV do not develop any signs or symptoms and may not know they have been infected with HPV. But they still carry the virus and infect others. There are many different types of HPV. Some types of HPV can cause genital warts. Other types can cause cancer, such as anal and penile cancer in men.

Why should I get vaccinated against HPV?

It is estimated that without immunization, three out of four sexually active Canadians will get HPV in their lifetime. Among men who have sex with men, the risk of HPV infection and genital warts is about three times higher than the rate for heterosexual males; and the risk of anal cancer is 20 times higher with men who have sex with men, compared to heterosexual males. Infections from most common types of HPV can be prevented with the HPV vaccine.

How can I get the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine is available through your local public health unit. To locate your public health unit, please visit: www.Ontario.ca/healthcareoptions.

Which HPV vaccine will I receive?

Gardasil[®], manufactured by Merck Canada, is the HPV vaccine used in Ontario's publicly funded HPV program. It was authorized for use in Canada in 2006. Gardasil protects against four types of HPV— types 6, 11, 16 and 18. These strains cause approximately 90 per cent of genital warts, 92 per cent of anal cancers, 89 per cent of mouth and certain types of throat cancers and 63 per cent of penile cancers.

What is the recommended schedule?

The HPV vaccine is given as either a two or three-dose series, depending on a person's age when they receive their first dose and their medical and immunization history. If you decide to get vaccinated, the vaccine series needs to be completed before you turn 27 years of age. ***It's important to get all the recommended doses for full protection.*** Contact your local public health unit or health care provider for more information.

When should I get the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine works best when people are vaccinated before they become sexually active, however the vaccine is still recommended for those who are already sexually active. A person who has been sexually active may not have been exposed to any or all the HPV types that are in the vaccine, so the vaccine will still offer some protection.

Is the HPV vaccine safe?

The HPV vaccine is safe and effective. The vaccine was tested and evaluated before receiving approval by Health Canada. It's approved for use in over 100 countries. Over 175 million doses have been distributed worldwide. Extensive, ongoing monitoring in Canada and globally continues to show that the HPV vaccine is very safe.

Are there any side effects?

Before receiving any vaccine, talk about the benefits and risks with your health care provider. Gardasil[®] has been shown to be generally well tolerated. As with all vaccines, there may be some side effects. The most common side effects are mild and include arm pain, swelling or redness where the injection is given. Other side effects that have been reported include: dizziness, nausea, headaches, fever and fainting. The risk of a severe reaction from the HPV vaccine is low.

Who should not get the HPV vaccine?

You should not get the HPV vaccine if you:

- Have had a life-threatening allergic reaction (also known as anaphylaxis) to a previous dose of the HPV vaccine; or
- Have a severe allergy to any component of the HPV vaccine or its container.

For other circumstances including previous side effects to a dose of HPV vaccine, illness or fever on the day the vaccine is to be given, talk to your local public health unit or health care provider.

When should I contact my health care provider?

If you have any unusual or severe symptoms after receiving the HPV vaccine, contact your local public health unit or health care provider immediately.

I'm 27 years old. Can I still get the HPV vaccine?

If you're over 26, talk to your health care provider about the potential benefits of HPV immunization. If you don't qualify for the free HPV vaccine, you can purchase the vaccine with a prescription from your family doctor or other primary care provider. Some private health insurance plans may offer coverage for the cost of the vaccine.

How else can I reduce my risk of HPV?

Because HPV is transmitted through intimate skin-to-skin contact, it can infect areas that are not covered by a condom - so condoms may not give full protection against getting HPV.

However, consistent and correct use of latex condoms can reduce (though not eliminate) the risk of sexually transmitted infections. To achieve the maximum protective effect, condoms must be used consistently and correctly.

What other vaccines am I eligible for?

Contact your health care provider or your local public health unit to discuss other publicly funded vaccines you may be eligible for.

Where can I get more information?

For more information on HPV contact your local public health unit or your health care provider.