

Human Papillomavirus Vaccine

Vaccines have saved more lives compared to any other medical intervention. Vaccines help the immune system recognize and fight bacteria and viruses that cause serious diseases.

Many human papillomavirus (HPV) infections are vaccine preventable.

- There are over 200 HPV viruses, and about 75% of Canadians will have an HPV infection in their lifetime.
- Immune compromised individuals are at high risk of developing HPV diseases.
- HPV is responsible for almost 3,800 new cancer cases each year in Canada.
- **Infection with high-risk HPV types 16, 18, 31, 33, 45, 52 and 58 can cause cancers in the mouth, nose, throat, anus, cervix, vagina, vulva, and penis.**
- HPV is associated with 60 to 73% of mouth and throat cancers, 90% of anal cancers, 40% of cervical, vaginal and vulvar cancers, and 40 to 50% of penile cancers.
- **Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer among Canadian women aged 15 to 44 years.** In 2023, there were approximately 1,550 new cases of cervical cancer and 400 deaths related to cervical cancer in Canada.
- HPV types 6 and 11 cause over 90% of genital warts that look like small, flesh-colored bumps or have a cauliflower-like appearance.
- HPV can cause a condition called recurrent respiratory papillomatosis (RRP), which affects the lungs and throat.

How is HPV spread?

- HPV viruses are spread through skin-to-skin contact including during sexual activity and to an infant during childbirth.

What are the symptoms of HPV infection?

- Most people do not show any signs or symptoms and clear within 2 years without treatment.
- In some people, their immune system cannot fight the HPV infection and may develop cancer.
- During an infection, an individual can pass HPV on to others.

How can HPV infections be prevented?

- The vaccine is very safe and effective to prevent HPV infections.
- **Getting immunized before being exposed to HPV viruses provides the best protection against developing serious HPV diseases.**
- Avoiding skin-to-skin contact is the only way to avoid getting or spreading an HPV infection.
- Limit the number of sexual partners you have and always use condoms to decrease your risk of exposure to HPV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Who can get this vaccine for free?

- Grade 6 students as part of the routine immunization program.
- Individuals born female since January 1, 1996, and born male since January 1, 2006, who missed the HPV vaccine in Grade 6 can receive it for free before they are 27 years old by contacting Public Health.
- Select immune compromised individuals who are 9 to 26 years old.
- NOTE: HPV vaccines are recommended for other people but are not available for free. Individuals should talk with their healthcare provider about privately purchasing HPV vaccine. **The Ministry of Health does not reimburse any costs associated with privately purchased vaccines.**

Who should not get this vaccine?

- Persons who have a serious acute illness, with or without a fever, should delay immunizations.
- People who had an anaphylactic reaction to a previous dose of any HPV vaccine, or any components of the vaccine.

What are common reactions to this vaccine?

It is much safer to get this vaccine than to get an HPV infection, genital warts or cancer.

- Temporary pain, redness and swelling at the injection site.
- Headache, fever, nausea, dizziness, tiredness or rash.
- These reactions are mild and may last 1 to 2 days.
- Only treat a fever (at least 6 to 8 hours after immunization) if you are uncomfortable and not sleeping.



It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine because there is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. This reaction can be treated and occurs in less than one in one million people who get the vaccine. **If this happens after you leave the clinic, get medical attention or call 911 right away.**

Who should you report reactions to?

- Report any adverse or unexpected reactions to your local public health nurse, your doctor, nurse practitioner or 811 as soon as possible.

Talk to a public health nurse:

- If you have questions or concerns about your or your child's reaction to an immunization.
- If you or your child had to go to a doctor, a hospital or to a health centre with a symptom that might be related to immunization.

What does the vaccine contain?

GARDASIL® 9 contains proteins of HPV types 6, 11, 16, 18, 31, 33, 45, 52 and 58, aluminum (as Amorphous Aluminum Hydroxyphosphate Sulfate adjuvant), L-histidine, polysorbate 80, sodium borate, sodium chloride and water for injection. Thimerosal-free, preservative-free, antibiotic-free and latex-free.

Mature Minor Consent

It is recommended that parents/guardians discuss consent for immunization with their children. Efforts are first made to get parental/guardian consent for immunizations. However, children at least 13 years of age up to and including 17 years of age, who are able to understand the benefits and possible reactions for each vaccine and the risks of not getting immunized, can legally consent to or refuse immunizations in Saskatchewan by providing mature minor informed consent to a healthcare provider.

Provincial immunization fact sheets are available at www.saskatchewan.ca/immunize.

References: [Canadian Immunization Guide](#). GARDASIL® 9 (2024) product monograph.

It is very important for:

- Females to get Pap tests every 3 years after becoming sexually active or by age 25 years, whichever is later.
- Individuals to be screened for anal, oral, throat and other head and neck cancers as recommended by their healthcare professional.

For more information, contact your local public health office, your physician, nurse practitioner, HealthLine online or by calling 811.