

# Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine

## What is the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine (Gardasil®9) protects against infection from 9 types of human papillomavirus (HPV) that can cause various cancers and genital warts. The vaccine is provided free to eligible people as part of B.C.'s routine immunization program. The vaccine is approved by Health Canada.

## Who should get the HPV vaccine?

The vaccine is recommended and free for people:

- 9 to 26 years of age
- 27 to 45 years of age who self-identify as belonging to the gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men community, including Two-Spirit, transgender and non-binary people (including those who are not yet sexually active and/or are questioning their sexual orientation)
- 27 to 45 years of age living with HIV
- Who were treated for abnormal changes to the cervix after a colposcopy on or after July 31, 2025.

It is important to have regular cervix screening because the HPV vaccine protects against most, but not all, types of HPV that cause cervical cancer.

School-aged children are routinely offered the vaccine in grade 6, with catchups in later grades for those who missed getting the vaccine. The vaccine is also available in several community-based settings. Contact your local pharmacy or public health unit to get immunized. People living in First Nations communities can contact their community health centre or nursing station to book an appointment.

Those not eligible for free HPV vaccine can buy it at most pharmacies and travel clinics.

## How is the vaccine given?

The vaccine is given as one dose or a series of doses depending on age and other factors. People 9-20 years of age should get one dose of the vaccine. People 21 years of age and older should get 2 doses. Three doses of vaccine are recommended for people 9 years of age and older who:

- Have a weakened immune system
- Are living with HIV
- Were treated for abnormal changes to the cervix after a colposcopy

It is best to get immunized before becoming sexually active and coming in contact with HPV because the vaccine prevents infection but does not clear it.

## What are the benefits of the vaccine?

The vaccine is very effective at preventing infection from 9 types of HPV. The vaccine protects against 7 types of HPV that can cause cancer of the anus, cervix, mouth and throat, penis, vagina and vulva. The vaccine also protects against two types of HPV that cause genital warts.

## What are the possible reactions to the vaccine?

Common reactions may include soreness, redness and swelling where the vaccine was given. Headache, fever, nausea, dizziness, tiredness, diarrhea and muscle soreness may also occur.

Acetaminophen (e.g. Tylenol®) or ibuprofen (e.g. Advil®) can be given for fever or soreness. ASA (e.g. Aspirin®) should not be given to anyone under 18 years of age due to the risk of Reye syndrome.

For more information on Reye syndrome, visit [HealthLinkBC File #84 Reye syndrome](#).

It is important to stay in the clinic for 15 minutes after getting any vaccine. There is an extremely rare possibility of a life-threatening allergic reaction called anaphylaxis. This happens in less than one in a million people who get the vaccine. Symptoms may include hives, difficulty breathing, or swelling of the throat, tongue or lips. If this reaction occurs, your health care provider is prepared to treat it. Emergency treatment includes administration of epinephrine (adrenaline) and transfer by ambulance to the nearest emergency department. If symptoms develop after you leave the clinic, call **9-1-1** or the local emergency number.

Always report serious or unexpected reactions to your health care provider.

### Who should not get the HPV vaccine?

Speak with your health care provider if you or your child has had a life-threatening reaction to a previous dose of HPV vaccine or to any part of the vaccine, including yeast.

There is no need to delay getting immunized because of a cold or other mild illness. If you have concerns, speak with your health care provider.

### What is HPV?

HPV is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs). About 3 out of 4 sexually active people who are unimmunized will get HPV at some time. Anyone who has any kind of oral, genital or anal sexual contact can get HPV. Sexual intercourse is not necessary to get infected. The more sexual partners you have the higher the risk of being infected with HPV. Males

who have sex with males are also at higher risk of HPV infection.

### What happens when you are infected with HPV?

Most people infected with HPV do not show any signs or symptoms and can pass the virus on to others without knowing it. Most often an HPV infection will clear on its own. For some people, HPV will not go away, and cells infected with the virus can become pre-cancerous or cancerous over time.

Every year in B.C. approximately:

- 230 people will get cervical cancer and 55 will die from the disease
- 6,000 people will develop high risk changes to the cervix which are precancerous
- 140 people will get anal cancer and 25 will die from the disease
- 5,500 people will develop genital warts

### Mature minor consent

It is recommended that parents or guardians and their children discuss consent for immunization. Children under the age of 19, who are able to understand the benefits and possible reactions for each vaccine and the risk of not getting immunized, can legally consent to or refuse immunizations. For more information on mature minor consent visit [HealthLinkBC File #119 The Infants Act, mature minor consent and immunization](#).

### For more information

- [HealthLinkBC File #101a Human papillomavirus \(HPV\) infection and genital warts](#)
- [Immunizations](#)



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