

The Dangers of HPV to Adolescents

Why is the HPV Vaccine Important?

About 14 million people, including teens, become infected with Human Papillomavirus (HPV) each year. HPV is a group of more than 150 related viruses that cause nearly all cervical cancers and many cancers of the vagina, vulva, penis, anus, rectum, and oropharynx. HPV is named for the warts (papilloma) that some HPV types can cause.

- ▶ Every year in the United States 31,000 women and men are diagnosed with a cancer caused by HPV infection. 81% of new HPV-associated cancer cases diagnosed each year could be prevented by HPV vaccination. Louisiana currently has higher rates of oropharyngeal cancer in men and women, and cervical cancer in women than the rest of the country.
- ▶ Louisiana also has the third-highest death rate from HPV-related cancers.
- ▶ Receiving the HPV vaccine *after* you are diagnosed with an HPV-related cancer will not provide a cure.

HPV vaccination prevents more than just cervical cancer. Vaccination can prevent uncomfortable testing and treatment even for cervical pre-cancers. Each year in the U.S. more than 300,000 women endure invasive testing and treatment for lesions (changes in the cells) on the cervix that can develop into cancers. Testing and treatment for these “pre-cancers” can have lasting effects.

Spread of HPV

HPV is transmitted through intimate skin-to-skin contact. HPV is so common that nearly all men and women get it at some point in their lives. HPV can be passed even when an infected person has no signs or symptoms. You can develop symptoms years after being infected, making it hard to know when you first became infected.

Symptoms

Most men who get HPV never develop symptoms and the infection usually goes away completely by itself. However, if HPV does not go away, it can cause genital warts or certain kinds of cancer.

HPV cancer usually does not have symptoms until

it is quite advanced, very serious and hard to treat. For this reason, it is important for women to get regular [screening](#) for cervical cancer. Cervical cancer screening can find early signs of disease so that problems can be treated early, before they ever turn into cancer.

When should my child be vaccinated?

The HPV vaccine is recommended for preteen boys and girls at age 11 or 12 so they are protected before ever being exposed to the virus. HPV vaccine also produces a higher immune response in preteens than in older adolescents. If your teen hasn't gotten the vaccine yet, talk to their doctor about getting it for them as soon as possible. HPV vaccination is a series of shots given over several months. The best way to remember to get your child all of the shots they need is to make an appointment for the remaining shots before you leave the doctor's office or clinic.

Is the HPV Vaccination safe?

Yes. Gardasil 9 is safe, effective, and recommended by CDC. Many studies have looked at the safety of HPV vaccines in the United States. An overview of these studies can be found on the [vaccine safety publications page](#).

Are there Side Effects?

Vaccines, like any medicine, can have side effects. Some people who get an HPV vaccine have no side effects at all. Some people report having mild side effects, like a sore arm from the shot for a day or two. The most common side effects are usually mild and go away on their own.

Fainting (also known as syncope) and related symptoms (such as jerking movements) can happen after any medical procedure. Some people, especially teens, faint after getting vaccinated. To prevent fainting and related injuries, people receiving HPV vaccines should sit or lie down during vaccination, then remain seated for 15 minutes after the shot.

Common Side Effects of the HPV Vaccine:

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- ▶ Pain, redness, or swelling in the arm where the shot was given
- ▶ Fever
- ▶ Headache or feeling tired
- ▶ Nausea
- ▶ Muscle or joint pain

How do the benefits of HPV vaccines compare to the risks?

The CDC has carefully studied the risks and benefits of HPV vaccination. HPV vaccination is recommended because the benefits, such as prevention of cancer, far outweigh the risks of possible side effects. Health decisions are personal, and each person should make choices that are right for themselves and their families. It is important to remember that choosing not to vaccinate is not a risk-free choice—HPV vaccines prevent serious cancers and other diseases in both males and females.

Where can I get my adolescent vaccinated?

Many private doctors and parish health units provide immunizations. Call your health care provider or parish health unit to make a vaccination appointment.

How can I get help paying for these vaccines?

The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program provides vaccines for children ages 18 years and younger, who are not insured, Medicaid-eligible, American Indian or Alaska Native. You can find out more about the VFC program by going online to www.cdc.gov and typing VFC in the search box.

Resources for Parents and Adolescents:

- ▶ Louisiana Department of Health, Office of Public Health: www.ldh.la.gov/CPH
- ▶ Centers for Disease Control HPV: www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/index.html
- ▶ American Association of Pediatrics HPV toolkit: www.aap.org/hpvtoolkit
- ▶ Louisiana AAP Adolescent Vaccine toolkit: www.laaap.org/adolescent-vaccine-toolkit
- ▶ AAP EQUIPP module on immunizations: www.eqipp.app.org
- ▶ Louisiana Cancer Prevention and Control Program: <http://louisianacancer.org/>

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. If you have any questions about the disease described above or think that you may have this infection, consult a health care provider.

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