

# #SWHRTalksHPV

## HPV Vaccine Questions & Answers

### What is the HPV vaccine?

- The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine protects against 9 types of HPV, including 7 that are high risk for causing cervical, vaginal, vulvar, penile, anal, and oropharyngeal (throat) cancers and 2 types that cause genital warts.
- HPV is very common and most people will be exposed to HPV in their lifetime.
- The vaccine is given as 2 or 3 shots, depending on your age at the initial dose.
- The vaccine is prophylactic (preventive). It must be given before exposure to HPV. It does not treat HPV infection or related symptoms.



### How safe is the HPV vaccine?

- Nearly 20 years of data show that the vaccine is safe and effective.
- You cannot get an HPV infection from the vaccine.
- The HPV vaccine may cause side effects that are common to all vaccines, including arm soreness, headache, mild fever, or fainting, which are typically mild and temporary.



### Why is the HPV vaccine recommended for pre-teens?

- The immune response to the HPV vaccine is better in children under 15 years old, requiring fewer doses to achieve immunity.
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends HPV vaccination for girls and boys 11-12 years old. Expert health organizations highly encourage starting as early as age 9.
- Starting vaccination at the earliest recommended age allows more time to administer the full vaccine series, when it is most effective and makes it more likely that the vaccine is given before any HPV exposure.



Age	HPV Vaccine Series	Timing
11-14 years (as early as age 9)	2 shots	Doses provided 6-12 months apart
15-26 years	3 shots	Doses provided at 0, 1-2, and 6 months



### I am older than 26. Can I still get vaccinated for HPV?

- Adults ages 27-45 should consult a health care provider and use shared decision-making to determine if HPV vaccination is appropriate. This may involve discussing history of potential HPV exposure and remaining benefits of vaccination based on age and other health factors.
- For people up to age 45, the vaccine is given as a 3-shot series, with an initial shot, a second dose in 1-2 months, and a third dose 6 months after the first.



### Should my son get the HPV vaccine?

- Yes! Boys benefit from the vaccine's protection against penile, anal, and oropharyngeal (throat) cancers. There are no screening tools for these cancers in men.
- The vaccine prevents the spread of HPV by men who may not know they have an infection because they do not show symptoms.

## Should my child get the HPV vaccine if their school doesn't require it?

- Yes! Public health experts recommend that all children receive the HPV vaccine, regardless of the vaccine requirements of your local school system.

## If my child is 15-26 years old, can they start or complete the HPV vaccine series?

- Yes! It is not too late to safeguard against HPV infections and cancer.
- The HPV vaccine is recommended for all individuals through age 26.
- It is likely that a young adult has not been exposed to all of the HPV types in the vaccine, so the vaccine could still offer protection from future infections.
- If your child missed a dose, it is not necessary to restart the HPV vaccine series, but it is important to complete the series as soon as possible.
- The number of catch-up doses needed to complete the series depends on the child's age at first dose:
  - If the first dose was given before age 15, only one catch-up dose is needed and can be given immediately.
  - If the first dose was given at 15 years or older, a total of 3 doses is needed and should be provided at the appropriate intervals.

## Where and how can I get the HPV vaccine?

- For many people, the HPV vaccine is free and accessible.
- Most comprehensive health insurers will cover the HPV vaccines without any additional out-of-pocket costs.
- The HPV vaccine may be available at doctor offices, community health clinics, school-based health centers, and local health departments.
- If your health care provider doesn't bring up the HPV vaccine, feel empowered to ask about it. You may also contact your child's school health services or local health department about your questions.



### Tips for productive conversations about the HPV vaccine with your child and others:

- Listen to the other person's questions, concerns, and opinions.
- Acknowledge that others' opinions (including those of your children) can be different from yours.
- Be ready to explain your point of view without being defensive. It's ok if you've changed your mind with new information. Be honest and open.
- Be aware that different cultures may have different assumptions and/or comfort levels discussing sexual activity and medical preferences.
- The HPV vaccine is a layer of protection against the viruses that can cause at least 6 different cancers, not all of which can be screened for or treated easily. Consider highlighting that we cannot predict who will develop cancer as a result of persistent HPV infections.

## Additional Resources

- American Cancer Society: <https://www.cancer.org/healthy/cancer-causes/infectious-agents/hpv.html>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/index.html>
- National HPV Vaccination Roundtable: <https://hpvroundtable.org/resource-library/>
- #SWHRTalksHPV Video Series: <https://youtube.com/womenshealth>

