

PROTECTION FROM HUMAN PAPILOMAVIRUS (HPV)

What is Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a common sexually transmitted virus that can infect the genital areas, mouth, throat or anus. There are many types of HPV. Some types of HPV can slowly develop into cancer if not found early and treated. Other types may develop into warts that are generally not harmful but are contagious.

How is HPV spread?

HPV can be spread by close contact during sexual activity with a person who has the virus. Most infections do not cause symptoms therefore people can have this infection without knowing it and can pass it on to others. Condoms can offer some protection from HPV and other sexually transmitted infections. However, this virus can be present on skin not covered by the condom so it can still spread by skin to skin contact.

Why do we recommend vaccination for HPV?

Most of the time HPV infection goes away on its own and does not cause any health problems. However, sometimes the infection will linger and create cell changes that can lead to cancer. The most common is cervical cancer in women but also HPV is related to other genital cancers and cancers of the mouth and throat in men and women. The HPV vaccine will reduce the risk of this occurring. This immunization works best when it is given to individuals before they start having sexual contact. It does not work as well for those who were exposed to the virus before getting the vaccine. Community/public health nurses will offer the HPV vaccine to all students in **grade six** as part of the provincial publically funded immunization program. Immunization consists of two doses of vaccine administered in the upper arm, 6 months apart.

Is the HPV vaccine safe?

All vaccines recommended by the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Provincial Department of Health and Community Services such as this one are safe and effective.

What are the vaccine's common side effects?

The most common side effects include soreness, swelling and/or redness at the injection site, slight fever, headache, muscle aches, fatigue or nausea. Serious side effects are rare and should be reported to the community/public health nurse.

The Pap test

A routine Pap test is the only way to find changes in the cells of the cervix that may lead to cervical cancer. All women should have regular Pap tests starting at age 21 even if they have had the HPV vaccine.

For additional information and services contact the Regional Health Authority in your community.