

HPV VACs

Vaccinate Adolescents against Cancers

MYTH
BUSTING

MYTH

1

The HPV vaccine is unsafe.

FACT: Scientists from both the CDC and the FDA continue to monitor and report any adverse events and side effects related to HPV vaccines. Monitoring in 2009 revealed that most side effects related to the vaccine were mild and were similar to those seen with any other vaccine. Several studies from 2011-2015 looking at over 2 million women and girls who have received the vaccine show that there is no relationship between HPV vaccines and autoimmune disorders, blood clots, or other serious disorders.¹

TALKING POINT: Over **67 million doses** of the HPV vaccine have been distributed in the US. The safety is continually monitored in 80 countries. **No** serious safety concerns have been identified.²

MYTH

2

The HPV vaccine causes serious side effects, including death.

FACT: Of the 47 verified deaths recorded among girls and women in the US that may be possibly related to HPV vaccination, the CDC has verified after careful review that there is no finding to support that Gardasil caused any of the deaths. In addition, there is no pattern of death occurring with respect to time after vaccination.¹

In the US, over **67 million doses** of the vaccine have been given, and all investigable adverse reactions have been studied and monitored.

All vaccines can have side effects. The reactions that people have had after the HPV vaccines have been mostly mild and similar to those from other vaccines.²

TALKING POINT: The vaccine was tested in numerous clinical trials and **proved to be safe; it continues to be monitored for safety.** No deaths have been causally linked to HPV vaccination.

The most common side effects are pain, redness, and/or swelling at the site of injection. Very rarely, more serious side effects such as anaphylactic (allergic) reaction can occur, usually if a person is allergic to an ingredient in the vaccine such as yeast.³

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3

The HPV vaccine causes fertility issues.

FACT: Claims of HPV vaccine-induced infertility are anecdotal and not backed by research or clinical trials. The HPV vaccine can actually help protect fertility by preventing gynecological problems related to the treatment of cervical cancer. It's possible that the treatment of cervical cancer could leave a woman unable to have children. It's also possible that treatment for cervical pre-cancer could put a woman at risk for problems with her cervix, which could cause preterm delivery or other problems.⁴

TALKING POINT: There are no data to suggest that getting the HPV vaccine will have a negative effect on future fertility. In fact, getting vaccinated and protecting against cervical cancer can help protect a woman's ability to get pregnant and have healthy babies.⁴

MYTH

4

The HPV vaccine contains harmful ingredients.

FACT: HPV vaccines contain ingredients that have been proven to be safe. Like the hepatitis B and Tdap vaccines, HPV vaccines contain aluminum, which boosts the body's immune response to the vaccine. In addition to certain vaccines, aluminum is found in breast milk, infant formula, antacids, and numerous foods and beverages, including fruits and vegetables, seasonings, flour, cereals, nuts, dairy products, and honey. Typical adults ingest 7 to 9 milligrams of aluminum per day; whereas the HPV vaccines contain .225 milligrams of aluminum per dose.⁵ These vaccines, as well as most others, do not contain thimerosal (a preservative that contains mercury).⁶

TALKING POINT: Given the quantities of aluminum we are exposed to on a daily basis, the quantity of aluminum in vaccines is miniscule. Aluminum-containing vaccines have been used for decades and have been given to over **1 billion people without problems**. In spring 2000, the National Vaccine Program Office reviewed aluminum exposure through vaccines and determined that no changes to vaccine recommendations were needed based on aluminum content. The Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety, part of the World Health Organization, has also reviewed studies and found no evidence of health risks that would require changes to vaccine policy.⁵

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The HPV vaccine is unnecessary unless you're sexually active, and it encourages sexual activity.

FACT: Vaccines are for prevention, not treatment, so they only work if given before coming in contact with a virus. Research also shows that younger people create more antibodies to the vaccine than those in their late teens.³

Studies have shown that HPV vaccination is not associated with changes in sexual behavior. Age of onset of sexual activity, incidence of STDs, and rates of pregnancy have all been shown to be similar in vaccinated girls compared to unvaccinated girls.^{7,9,10}

TALKING POINT: People are vaccinated well before they're exposed to an infection (i.e., measles and the other recommended childhood vaccines). Similarly, they should be vaccinated before they are exposed to HPV. Also, the HPV vaccine produces a higher immune response in preteens than it does in older teens.³

HPV is so common that almost everyone will be exposed at some point in their lives. So even if your child delays sexual activity until marriage, or only has one partner in the future, they could still be exposed if their partner has been exposed.⁸

Studies have shown there's no correlation between receiving the HPV vaccine and increased rates of (or earlier engagement in) sexual activity.⁹

MYTH

6

The HPV vaccine is only for females.

FACT: Both males and females can get HPV. It's very common; the CDC estimates that between 80-90% of sexually active people would be infected with at least one type of HPV in their lifetime.¹¹

Although cervical cancer is the most common type of cancer caused by HPV, persistent infection also causes cancers of the tongue and the base of the tonsils. These cancers are becoming more common, especially among men, and may be more common than cervical cancer by 2020. HPV can also cause penile and anal cancers affecting men. The **HPV vaccine provides protection against most of the genital cancers in men** caused by HPV infection.³

TALKING POINT: HPV vaccination is strongly recommended for males and females. Vaccination helps protect boys from getting infected with the most common types of HPV that can cause cancers of the throat, penis, and anus; it also helps prevent most genital warts. In addition, when boys are vaccinated, they are less likely to spread HPV to their current and future partners.⁴

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7

The HPV vaccine is not effective and doesn't prevent cancer.

FACT: In the studies that led to the approval of HPV vaccines, the vaccines provided nearly 100% protection against persistent cervical infections with HPV types 16 and 18, plus the pre-cancers that those persistent infections can cause. In addition, a clinical trial of HPV vaccines in men indicated that they can prevent anal cell changes caused by persistent infection and genital warts.⁸

HPV-associated cancers can take decades to develop, and the vaccines have not been in use long enough to produce studies comparing cancer rates. Advanced pre-cancers have long been universally accepted markers for cancers.

TALKING POINT: The vaccine has been proven, through numerous studies, to prevent the cell changes and infections that correspond with multiple HPV-associated cancers.

In addition, population studies in the US and other countries that have introduced the HPV vaccine have shown a significant reduction in abnormal Pap test results^{14,15} and genital warts.^{16,17}

MYTH

8

People already know about the HPV vaccine, and will ask for it if they want it.

FACT: Studies have shown many parents (37%) have no prior knowledge about the vaccine before their child's provider educates them about it. Knowledge varies across racial/ethnic groups, socioeconomic status, and geographic areas.¹²

TALKING POINT: A strong provider recommendation is the **single best predictor of vaccination.**²

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The effectiveness of the HPV vaccine decreases over time.

FACT: Ongoing studies have found that those who received the vaccine continue to have antibodies to the virus, providing long-term protection against infections and pre-cancers. There is no indication that they will decrease over time, but studies continue.¹³

TALKING POINT: Current data suggest the vaccine protection is ongoing, with no sign of waning. The mechanism of immune memory has been demonstrated in women who have been vaccinated, indicating the vaccine will provide long-term immunity. If it's discovered that the immunity does wane, a booster may be recommended, similar to many other vaccines.

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