

# Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine

## Parent Information Sheet

NSW Health offers the vaccines recommended for adolescents by the National Health and Medical Research Council in a school vaccination program. Signed parental/guardian consent must be provided.

### Your next steps:

- Carefully read this information sheet.
- If you would like your child to be vaccinated against human papillomavirus (HPV), complete the Consent Form and give the signed Consent Form to your child to return to school.
- If you do not wish your child to be vaccinated against HPV, do not provide consent.

### Q. What is HPV and how is it spread?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus affecting both men and women. HPV is spread through genital contact during sex with someone who has the virus. The virus passes through tiny breaks in the skin and is not spread through blood or other body fluids. Condoms offer limited protection, as they do not cover all of the genital skin.

Not all types of HPV will cause visible symptoms. Many people with HPV infection will not be aware of it.

Some HPV types can cause warts on any part of the body. This includes the genital area (vulva, vagina, cervix, penis, scrotum, anus, and perineum). Warts are usually painless, but sometimes cause itching or discomfort. The types of HPV that cause warts are called 'low-risk' because they are not linked to cancer.

Other HPV types are called 'high-risk' because they can cause pre-cancerous cells to grow. These cells may turn into cancer if left untreated.

High-risk HPV is responsible for 5% of all cancers worldwide, including:

- almost all cases of cervical cancer
- 90% of anal cancers
- 78% of vaginal cancers
- 60% of oropharyngeal cancers (cancers of the

back of the throat, tongue, and tonsils)

- 25% of vulva cancers
- 50% of penile cancers

Vaccinating males will prevent male cancers and genital warts and importantly, will also help to protect females from cervical cancer.

### Q. How do vaccines work?

Vaccines work by triggering the immune system to fight certain infections. If a vaccinated person comes into contact with these infections, their immune system is able to respond more effectively, preventing the disease developing or greatly reducing its severity.

### Q. Which vaccine will be used?

An HPV vaccine that protects against 9 types of HPV (6, 11, 16, 18, 31, 33, 45, 52 and 58).

### Q. How many HPV doses does my child need?

International research shows that one dose of any HPV vaccine provides the same protection as a two-dose course. Based on this evidence, the Australian Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (ATAGI) recommended that Australia transition to a one dose HPV vaccine schedule in 2023.

Some adolescents who are significantly immunocompromised are recommended to have three doses of HPV vaccine. A 3 dose schedule requires an interval of 2 months between dose 1 and dose 2, and 4 months between dose 2 and dose 3.

Significant immunocompromise is defined as those with:

- primary or secondary immune-deficiencies (B lymphocyte antibody and T lymphocyte complete or partial deficiencies)
- HIV infection
- people with cancer

- organ transplantation
- autoimmune disease
- significant immunosuppressive therapy (excluding asplenia or hyposplenia).

**Q. What about adolescents who have already had one dose?**

Students who have already received one dose of HPV vaccine no longer need a second dose. They are considered up to date and fully vaccinated.

Regular cervical screening (previously called Pap smears) is still important for vaccinated women, as the HPV vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer. All women from 25 years of age or those who have ever been sexually active should have a Cervical Screening Test every 5 years, regardless of their HPV vaccination status.

**Q. Who should be vaccinated?**

All students in Year 7 and Intensive English Centre students from 12 years of age should receive a single dose schedule of HPV vaccine. For more information, contact your local public health on 1300 066 055.

**Q. Who should not be vaccinated?**

HPV vaccine should not be given to people who:

- are or may be pregnant
- have had anaphylaxis following a previous vaccine
- have had anaphylaxis following any of the vaccine additives (listed over the page)
- have a history of anaphylaxis to yeast

**Q. How effective is the vaccine?**

The vaccine protects against high-risk HPV types that cause over 90% of cervical cancers in women and also protects against additional HPV types that cause cancers in men.

The latest research shows that the vaccine still offers close to 100% protection more than 10 years after it was given. Since the introduction of the National HPV vaccination program (in 2007 for females and 2013 for males) the incidence of:

- high-grade cervical abnormalities in vaccine eligible age groups decreased by nearly 50%
- genital warts in young people (under 21) reduced by 90%.

As cervical cancer usually develops over 10 or more years, the role of the vaccine in reducing cervical cancer will not be evident for some time.

The incidence of cervical cancer has significantly decreased since the National Cervical Screening Program began in 1991 and a national Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine program was introduced in 2007.

**Q. What if I prefer to wait until my child is older?**

HPV vaccination is most effective when it is given to adolescents before they become sexually active. These vaccines can only be provided at school by you returning the original consent form while your child is at school. If you choose to wait until your child is older you will need to make arrangements with your GP or pharmacist immuniser.

If vaccination is provided through a GP or pharmacist, the vaccine will be free, but you may be charged a consultation fee.

**Q. What additives does HPV vaccine contain?**

The vaccine contains yeast, aluminium adjuvant, sodium chloride, L-histidine, polysorbate and sodium borate. Additives are included in very small amounts to either assist the vaccine to work or to act as a preservative.

**Q. How safe are vaccines?**

Vaccines used in Australia are safe and must pass strict safety testing before being approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA). In addition, the TGA monitors the safety of vaccines once they are in use.

**Q. What are the side effects of vaccination?**

Side effects are commonly mild and usually involve pain, swelling and redness at the injection site. Serious side effects are extremely rare. NSW parents who were followed up in the days after HPV vaccination reported that less than 11% of students experienced mild side effects while only 0.5% required medical attention. More information about side effects is available in the Consumer Medicines Information (CMI) for the vaccine available from [www.health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination). Parents concerned about side effects after vaccination should contact their GP who should also make a report to the local public health unit.

**Q. What is anaphylaxis?**

Anaphylaxis is a severe allergic reaction that may result in unconsciousness and death if not treated

quickly. It occurs very rarely after any vaccination. The school immunisation nurses are fully trained in the treatment of anaphylaxis.

**Q. Will my daughter still need cervical screening?**

Yes. Regular cervical screening (previously called Pap smears) is still important for vaccinated women, as the HPV vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer.

All women from 25 years of age who have ever been sexually active should have a Cervical Screening Test every 5 years, regardless of their HPV vaccination status.

**Q. What if my child has asthma and takes cortisone or prednisone by a “puffer”?**

The vaccine can be safely administered to someone who has asthma regardless of which medications they are taking.

**Q. Who can consent to vaccination and can consent be withdrawn?**

Only parents/guardians can consent to vaccination for students less than 18 years of age. Students aged 18 years and over may consent to their own vaccination and should complete and sign the Consent Form where ‘Parent/Guardian’ is indicated. Consent can be withdrawn at any time by providing the school with written notification of the withdrawal of consent or telephoning the school to withdraw consent.

**Q. Should the vaccine be given to a female student who is or thinks she may be pregnant?**

No. Any female student who is, or thinks she may be, pregnant should not be vaccinated. On the day of the clinic the vaccination nurse will ask female students if they are or could be pregnant.

If a student answers yes to this question, she will not be vaccinated. The student will be urged to immediately discuss the issue with her parent/guardian and to seek medical help. She will also be provided with contact details for a health referral service that will provide advice, support and guidance.

**Q. What can I do if my child missed out on the vaccine because of illness or absence on the day of the nurses’ visit?**

If HPV vaccination has been missed at school, catch-up should occur as soon as possible. Some schools will host catch-up clinics, otherwise parents should contact their local GP or pharmacist to arrange vaccination.

**Q. How can I access a record of the vaccinations?**

Information about your child’s vaccinations will be uploaded to the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) so it can be linked to your child’s existing immunisation history.

Parents can request a copy of their child’s AIR Immunisation History Statement at any time up to their child being 14 years of age, and students aged 14 years and over can request their own immunisation history statement, as follows:

- using the Medicare online account through myGov [my.gov.au/](https://my.gov.au/)
- using the Medicare Express Plus App [www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/subjects/express-plus-mobile-apps](https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/subjects/express-plus-mobile-apps)
- calling the AIR General Enquiries Line on 1800 653 809.

**Q. What will happen to my child’s information?**

The information you provide on the Consent Form is subject to strict confidentiality and privacy protections contained in NSW and Commonwealth legislation (see the enclosed Privacy Statement).

The information will be entered into a NSW Health immunisation register and then uploaded to the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) so it can be linked to your child’s existing immunisation history and viewed on MyGov.

Female students receiving HPV vaccine – by signing the Consent Form, you are agreeing to disclose your child’s health information for linkage to the National Cervical Screening Program Register in the future.

**Q. Where can I find more information about school vaccination?**

More information is available:

- by visiting the NSW Health website at [www.health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination](https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/schoolvaccination)
- by contacting your local public health unit on 1300 066 055.

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