Key messages

- **HPV is a very common** virus that is **sexually transmitted.**
- It **can cause cervical cancer,** cancer of the vulva, vagina, penis, throat, and genital warts.
- The **vaccine is offered for free** in schools during year 7.
- It offers **protection against types of HPV** that cause most cervical cancers.
- **More information** about HPV, the vaccine and links to consent forms are provided.

What is HPV?

HPV is spread through any sexual contact (it can pass through tiny breaks in the skin). It is not spread in blood or body fluids. Most people who have ever been sexually active will have HPV at some point in their lives.

Most people who have HPV do not even know they have it. They may not develop symptoms and it goes away without causing any problems. However, HPV can cause:

- cervical cancer
- cancers of the vulva, vagina, penis, anus and throat
- genital warts.

The HPV vaccine can protect against some types of HPV. Condoms may not fully protect against HPV as HPV can be present in parts that are not covered by the condom (e.g. genital warts).

Who should have the vaccine?

People of all genders should have the HPV vaccine, preferably before they become sexually active.

From 2023, healthy young people aged 12-13 years will only need one dose of the Gardasil®9 vaccine to be considered fully vaccinated.

What are the benefits?

- The HPV vaccine protects against strains of HPV that are sexually transmitted.
- Almost all cervical cancers are linked to HPV infection.
- HPV vaccines are critical to eliminating cervical cancer.
- Vaccination also protects against genital warts and HPV related genital, anal and throat cancers.

Since the introduction of the national HPV vaccine program in 2007, there has been a more than 90 per cent reduction in genital warts. In 2015, the proportion of people diagnosed with genital warts was less than 1 per cent.

The HPV vaccine provides protection against nine types of HPV including:

- types 16 and 18, the two types that cause the majority of HPV-related cancers
- the five next most common HPV types associated with cervical cancer (types 31, 33, 45, 52 and 58)
- two non-cancer-causing HPV types (types 6 and 11), which cause 90% of genital warts.

The HPV vaccine is not effective against an HPV infection that is already in the body, so it is best to vaccinate before potential exposure to the virus.

The HPV vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer. It is important for women and people with a cervix to have regular cervical screening even if they are fully vaccinated.

How is the vaccine given?

The Gardasil®9 vaccine is delivered via a free school-based program to students in Year 7 in Western Australia.

Consent must be provided by a parent or guardian for their child/ren to receive vaccinations at school. Parents and guardians are encouraged to provide consent online via VaccinateWA (external site).

If parents and guardians are not able to access the online system, they can request a hard copy form from school or print a copy of the school-based immunisation program consent form. More information about consent and the school-based immunisation program is available on HealthyWA.

If students missed their vaccination at school, they can receive a catch-up vaccination from another immunisation provider such as at community immunisation clinics, or at participating GPs, pharmacies or Aboriginal Medical Services. Those who missed out on their HPV vaccination where they were first eligible can catch-up until 26 years of age. Please note, some immunisation providers may charge a consultation fee.

What are the risks?

The HPV vaccine is safe and well tolerated. Around the world millions of doses have been given. The vaccine does not contain live HPV virus but instead contains a protein that helps the body’s immune system fight HPV infection.

Common side effects

Common side effects can be treated with a cold pack or paracetamol if needed. They include:

- pain, redness and swelling at the injection site
- a temporary small lump in the spot the injection was given
- low grade fever
- feeling unwell
- headache
- fainting may occur up to 30 minutes after any vaccination.

The common side effects can be reduced by:

- drinking extra fluids and not overdressing if you have a fever
- placing a cold wet cloth on the sore injection site.

Reporting an adverse event

The Western Australian Vaccine Safety Surveillance (WAVSS) System is the central reporting service in WA for any significant adverse events following immunisation.

If you have experienced an adverse reaction to a vaccine:

- visit WA Vaccine Safety Surveillance (WAVSS) (external site)
- phone WAVSS on (08) 9321 1312 (8.30am to 4.30pm).

More information

- Visit HealthyWA
- Visit The Cancer Council (external site) for information on HPV and HPV vaccines for parents, schools and professionals.

Where to get help

- For emergency or life-threatening conditions, visit an emergency department or dial triple zero (000) to call an ambulance
- See your doctor
- Visit a GP after hours
- Ring *healthdirect* on 1800 022 222

Related learning activities

- HPV vaccination

References

http://healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/F_I/HPV-vaccine

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