

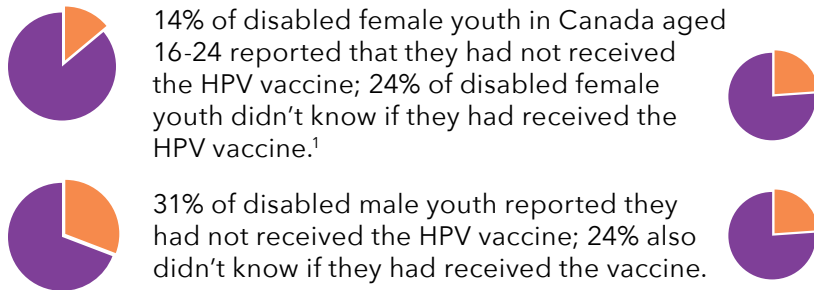
# Getting the HPV vaccine: Information for Disabled Youth

If you're a disabled young person, you are entitled to positive sexual health. Access to healthcare services, including the HPV vaccine, can be an important part of supporting your sexual health and well-being.

## The HPV vaccine is cancer prevention.

**Getting the HPV vaccine can be an especially important way to reduce your risk of HPV-related cancers, particularly, if cancer screenings are not accessible to you.**

According to research conducted by the Sex Information and Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN):



A significant reason why disabled youth don't receive the vaccine is the belief that it is not needed or that healthcare providers do not recommend it.<sup>2</sup> **The HPV vaccine can prevent over 90% of HPV related-cancers and 90% of genital warts caused by HPV.**<sup>3,4</sup>

If you do not get the vaccine and you are having sex, there is a high chance you will get HPV at some point in your life. Even if you do not develop health problems from HPV, **you can still pass HPV to another person.** Getting the HPV vaccine protects you and the people you have sex with.

Most people will have no side effects when they get the HPV vaccine. Sometimes, people might feel a bit of pain, redness, or swelling in the area where they got the vaccine. But these symptoms will usually go away in a few days. In a very small number of cases, people might have an allergic reaction, or they might faint after getting the HPV vaccine.

**Overcoming unequal access to healthcare:**

## The importance of the HPV vaccine

It can be hard for disabled youth to access sexual and reproductive health services because of:

- Systemic ableism in the healthcare system
  - Inaccessible healthcare facilities
  - Lack of adaptive equipment
  - Inadequate practitioner training
- Infantilization of youth with disabilities, or not recognizing disabled youth as sexually active<sup>5</sup>

Discrimination, exclusion and stigma in the healthcare system result in poor sexual health outcomes for disabled youth. When youth also have other marginalized identities (e.g., being racialized, gender diverse, low income, etc.), they may face additional barriers to healthcare access.

**Accessing inclusive, comprehensive, and accessible sexual and reproductive healthcare enhances sexual health and well-being of youth with disabilities.** Below is information on what HPV is, how to get the vaccine, and how to communicate your sexual health needs with your healthcare provider.



## What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a group of over 100 different types of viruses, more than 40 of which are spread through sexual contact. **About 75% of sexually active people will get at least one HPV infection in their lifetime, making it the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI).<sup>6</sup>**

HPV causes **90%** of cervical cancers, **90%** of anal cancers, **50%** of penile cancers, **40%** of vulvar/vaginal cancers and **80%** of oropharyngeal cancers.<sup>7,8</sup>

HPV also causes genital warts. **Disabled women experience significantly higher rates of cervical cancer compared to non-disabled women due to low cancer screening.<sup>9,10,11</sup>**

Most people who have HPV do not have symptoms and do not know they have HPV. A person with HPV can pass the infection to a sex partner even when they have no signs or symptoms.

## How is HPV transmitted?

People can get HPV from skin-to-skin contact during sex, such as when the vulva, vagina, cervix, penis, throat, or anus comes into contact with another person's genitals, mouth, or throat. It can spread without ejaculation or penetration of the penis into the vagina, anus, or mouth.

Because HPV is spread through skin-to-skin contact, condoms and dental dams can lower the risk of an HPV infection, but they do not eliminate the risk of getting HPV, genital warts, or HPV-related cancers.

## Communicating your health needs

How you communicate your health needs to your parents and healthcare providers is up to you. Understanding information about HPV and the HPV vaccine allows you to make informed decisions for yourself about your sexual health.

Here are some examples of how you can advocate for your own sexual health:

- Bringing a trusted friend with you to appointments.
- You can say **“Protecting myself and partner(s) is really important to me. I’d like to get the HPV vaccine.”**
- You can say **“I brought a list of questions and concerns I have about taking care of my sexual and reproductive health.”**
- You can say **“I would prefer you to walk me through everything you are doing to help me reduce my risk of HPV-related cancers.”**

## Get the HPV vaccine

All provinces and territories offer free HPV vaccine programs in schools for students. If your school offers the HPV vaccine for your grade, get the vaccine when the program happens at your school.

If not,

1. Speak to a Healthcare Provider.
2. Get a prescription from a physician or nurse practitioner. In some provinces, pharmacists can also provide a prescription.
3. Pick up your vaccine (Cervarix or Gardasil 9) and get vaccinated. In all provinces, primary care providers, physicians, nurse practitioners, and pharmacists can administer the vaccine. The territories differ in allowing pharmacists to administer the vaccine
4. Submit your private insurance claim if applicable.

If you have private insurance or are eligible for any benefits the vaccine might be partially or fully covered. **Check with your insurance company or case worker to see if the cost of the vaccine is covered.**

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