

# I'm a millennial woman: Should I get vaccinated for HPV?

Cervical cancer is now the fastest growing cancer among females in Canada.<sup>1</sup> Many people are not aware that some cancers are caused by viruses.

**Nearly all (91%) cases of cervical cancer are caused by the Human Papillomavirus (HPV).** Among women, HPV infections also cause 93% of anal cancers, 73% of vaginal cancers, 69% of vulvar cancers and 73% of oropharyngeal (throat) cancers.<sup>2,3</sup> HPV also causes genital warts.<sup>4</sup>

HPV is a very common sexually transmitted infection (STI): Over 70% of women in Canada experience an HPV infection in their lifetime.<sup>5</sup>

**You can get or pass HPV through close skin-to-skin contact during sex even when the partner with the infection has no symptoms.**<sup>5</sup> HPV is easily passed during genital-oral or genital-genital contact (penis-vagina, penis-anus, vulva-vulva).

An HPV infection usually clears within two years. In some people, it persists, leading to precancerous changes that may eventually lead to cancer. HPV symptoms can develop years after having sex with someone which makes it hard to know when your exposure took place.<sup>6</sup>

## Good News:

### HPV-Related Cancers are Preventable

The Canadian Cancer Society recommends that females up to age 45 be vaccinated against HPV to reduce the risk of HPV-related cancers.<sup>4</sup>

### The HPV Vaccine

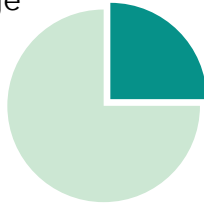
The HPV vaccine will protect you against the most common HPV strains that cause cervical, anal, vaginal, vulvar, and throat cancers, and genital warts.

**HPV vaccination can prevent over 90% of cancers caused by HPV.<sup>7</sup> Research indicates that the HPV vaccine is safe and effective.**<sup>4,8</sup>



## Have You Been Vaccinated for HPV?

The Sex Information & Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) asked 1220 women aged 35-44 if they had received the HPV vaccine. Only one quarter of women in this age group indicated they had received the vaccine.\* Women who were not vaccinated were asked why they had not received the vaccine. Below are two of the most common responses plus related HPV facts you can use to make an informed choice about getting vaccinated for HPV.



### “I’m too old for the vaccine”

**The HPV vaccine is safe and recommended for women up to age 45.**<sup>4</sup> At any age, having a new sex partner is a risk factor for getting a new HPV infection. While many women have been exposed to some HPV types by age 45, natural immunity resulting from previous infection is not guaranteed. **The HPV vaccine will protect you against infection from HPV types you have not been previously exposed to as well as provide further protection from re-infection with HPV types that have caused previous infections.**<sup>9</sup>

### “I’m in a steady relationship”

Most HPV infections are asymptomatic (i.e., no physical signs of infection). **People in “steady” relationships may have active HPV infections acquired BEFORE entering their current relationship.** HPV can be passed from one person to another even when the person with the infection has no symptoms.

\* Analyses exclude “I don’t know/I don’t remember” and “I prefer not to answer”.

## Steps to reduce your risk of HPV infection and HPV-related cancer

- **HPV Vaccine:** The HPV vaccine will protect you against the most common HPV types that cause cancer and genital warts.
- **Cervical Cancer Screenings:** Regular cervical cancer screenings (Pap test, HPV test) detect abnormal cells in the cervix or the presence of HPV. Speak to your Healthcare Provider to ensure that you are up to date with your cervical screenings. Recommended cervical cancer screening guidelines vary by province and territory.
- **Condoms and Dental Dams:** Since HPV is spread through skin-to-skin contact, correct and consistent condom and/or dental dam use may reduce but will not eliminate the risk of HPV.<sup>4</sup>

## To get the HPV vaccine:

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 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.<sup>10</sup>
4. Submit your private insurance claim if applicable. Many private health insurance plans reimburse some or all of the cost of the vaccine.

1 Canadian Cancer Society. 2023. <https://cancer.ca/en/about-us/stories/2023/4-key-cancer-findings-in-2023>

2 Habbous, S., Chu, K. P., Lau, H., Schorr, M., Belayneh, M., Ha, M. N., Murray, S., O’Sullivan, B., Huang, S. H., Snow, S., Parliament, M., Hao, D., Cheung, W. Y., Xu, W., Liu, G. 2017. Human papillomavirus in oropharyngeal cancer in Canada: Analysis of 5 comprehensive cancer centres using multiple imputation. Canadian Medical Association Journal, cmaj.161379

3 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2023. <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/hpv/statistics/cases.htm>

4 Canadian Cancer Society. n.d. <https://cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/reduce-your-risk/get-vaccinated/human-papillomavirus-hpv>

5 Public Health Agency of Canada. 2024. <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/infectious-diseases/sexual-health-sexually-transmitted-infections/human-papillomavirus-hpv.html>

6 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2022a. <https://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/stdfact-hpv.htm#:~:text=You%20can%20get%20HPV%20by,have%20no%20signs%20or%20symptoms.>

7 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2022b. <https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/cancer.html>

8 Palmer, T. J., Kavanagh, K., Cuschieri, K., Cameron, R., Graham, C., Wilson, A., & Roy, K. 2024. Invasive cervical cancer incidence following bivalent human papillomavirus vaccination: a population-based observational study of age at immunization, dose, and deprivation. JNCI: Journal of the National Cancer Institute, djad263.

9 Beachler, D. C., Jenkins, G., Safaiean, M., Kreimer, A. R., Wentzensen, N. 2016. Natural acquired immunity against subsequent genital human papillomavirus infection: A systematic review and meta-analysis. The Journal of Infectious Diseases, jib753

10 Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. 2022. <https://www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca/topics/hpv-vaccine-access-2022/>