

STIEF 

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# Preventing HPV Cancers by Vaccination



## Facts about HPV (Human Papillomavirus)

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- HPV is a common virus that can cause cancers in people of all sexes.
- Without vaccination, 80% of adults will have an HPV infection at some point in their life.
- In most people the virus is harmless and causes no symptoms, so you may be unaware that you have it.
- It is mainly spread by skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity.
- Vaccination against HPV infection has been available for many years, and protects against HPV cancers.

## Why get vaccinated?

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The HPV vaccine prevents human papillomavirus (HPV) types that cause several cancers, including:

- **Cervical cancer**
- **Vaginal and vulval cancers**
- **Anal cancer**
- **Throat cancer**
- **Penile cancer**

The HPV vaccine also prevents HPV types that cause **genital warts** and will prevent most cases of genital warts.

*Vaccination is not a substitute for cervical screening. This vaccine protects against most, but not all, HPV types that cause cervical cancer. **All people with a cervix should still get regular cervical screening tests.***

## When should vaccination occur?

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Vaccination is most effective when given prior to HPV infection, i.e. before becoming sexually active. For people who are already sexually active, the vaccine may still be of benefit as it will prevent the acquisition of new HPV infections for the strains the vaccine covers.

## How effective is the vaccine?

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It is highly effective and immunity is longlasting. Boosters are not required. Almost all HPV infections that cause abnormal cells and cancer can be prevented by the HPV vaccine.

## How safe is the vaccine?

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The vaccine is very safe and no different from other common vaccines. The most common side effect is soreness at the injection site. Millions of doses have now been given all over the world. As for all medicines and vaccines, ongoing surveillance continues to monitor safety.

*HPV vaccination offers the best protection against genital warts and HPV-related cancers. While most HPV-related cancers cannot be screened for, the cervical screening programme detects cell changes on the cervix.*

## How long does the vaccine last for?

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Completing the primary vaccination course (2 or 3 doses depending on age) is expected to offer lifelong protection.

## How do you get vaccinated and what will it cost?

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The HPV vaccine (Gardasil 9) is licensed for use in New Zealand for females aged 9–45 years and males aged 9–26 years. It is given in 2 or 3 doses depending on age.

- 2 doses: 9–14 years (given over 6–12 months)
- 3 doses: 15+ years (given over 6 months)

### **The vaccine is free for the following groups:**

- Everyone aged from 9 years up to their 27th birthday, can receive HPV immunisation FREE as part of the Ministry of Health's HPV Immunisation Programme.
- Gardasil 9 is offered to year 8 students (12 year olds), of all genders, in participating schools through a funded school-based vaccination programme.
- For everyone aged 9–26 years (inclusive) who do not get vaccinated at school, Gardasil is available free of charge through their GP or Health Care Provider.

### **The vaccine can also be purchased:**

- People outside the funded groups can pay for the vaccine.
- The cost of the full 3 doses will vary but is approximately \$500.
- Your Family Doctor or Primary Health Care Nurse will be able to give you more information on the cost of the vaccine.

## Why are males now included in the vaccination programme?

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Research shows that HPV infection is shared during sexual activity and males are at risk of HPV anal, penile and throat cancers.

## Do you need to find out if you are already infected before having the vaccine?

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No. There is no single HPV test (such as a blood test or swab) to check for all HPV types at multiple body sites. Also, HPV is good at “hiding”, and may only be present at undetectable levels. Therefore, HPV testing is not required before vaccination.

## What if you choose not to vaccinate?

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- As HPV is common and often shared once you start having sex, if you are not vaccinated and are sexually active, you are at risk of infection.
- There is no effective screening or testing for anal, vulval, penile or throat HPV-related infections or cancers, therefore vaccination of males and females, ideally before ever having sex, is highly recommended and is the most effective way of preventing HPV.
- For all people with a cervix, regular cervical screening will ensure early detection and treatment of HPV-related abnormal cells and prevention of most cervical cancer.

## Vaccination and safer sex practices

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In addition to HPV vaccination, it is also recommended that people continue to protect their sexual health by:

- Using a condom every time for any casual sexual encounter and with a new partner.
- Getting a sexual health check done before having sex with a new partner and after any unprotected sex. It's simple and well worth your time.

For the full answers and supporting references addressing the above facts, go to:

[www.immune.org.nz](http://www.immune.org.nz)

or phone toll free: **0800 IMMUNE (0800 466 863)**

# HPV Vaccine

## More key facts

### **HPV vaccine is very safe**

The vaccine is not different or special compared to other common vaccines. Extensive research with millions of participants shows that Gardasil does not increase the risk for any serious condition\* and is very safe for all ages, and all genders. As with all medicines and vaccines, extensive global ongoing surveillance continues to monitor safety.

### **HPV vaccine reduces HPV-related disease**

Some myths have suggested that the vaccine made existing infections worse. This is not true. Studies show no worsening of pre-existing diseases. Ideally, the vaccine should be given before your first encounter with sexual activity because it does not treat an existing HPV infection.

### **Protection from the vaccine is expected to be long-lasting**

Not only is the vaccine safe but it also offers long-lasting protection. Current data suggests the vaccine protection is ongoing, with no sign of waning. The mechanism of immune memory has been demonstrated, indicating that the vaccine will provide long-term protection, possibly for life.

### **HPV infection can affect fertility**

HPV vaccine protects fertility. Studies show the same rate of pregnancy and births occur in vaccinated and unvaccinated women. In some cases, not being vaccinated can lead to adverse pregnancy outcomes such as miscarriage, prematurity or low birthweight related to the weakening of the cervix as a result of treatment for HPV infection.

### **The vaccine has been shown to be safe during pregnancy**

No birth defects are associated with the vaccine. Specific congenital abnormalities reported in the clinical trials and subsequent studies are the same in both vaccinated and non-vaccinated groups. Extensive, ongoing research supports this.

### **Protecting your child by early HPV vaccination against acquisition of HPV infections does not contribute to them being more sexually active later in life**

There is no evidence that the HPV vaccine given at age 11 or 12 years has any bearing on when or how much your child becomes sexually active. In fact, research has shown that girls who have been vaccinated against HPV have subsequently made more responsible decisions regarding their sexual health compared to non-vaccinated girls. There are other vaccines given for infections associated with sexual transmission, e.g. Hepatitis B, and none of them influence the future sexual behaviour of the child who has it.

### **There is no evidence to indicate other HPV types will replace those controlled by the vaccine**

There is no evidence that immunity against the nine HPV types in the vaccine is associated with a changing prevalence of other HPV types.

### **The vaccine has been tested in children down to 9 years of age**

The clinical trials included girls and boys aged from 9 years of age, who were tested for their immune response to the vaccine and followed up for safety.

The group who received the vaccine in early adolescence has now been followed as young adults, with no development of the HPV infections covered by the vaccine.

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## **Aluminium salts are used in many pharmaceutical products from medicines to cosmetics**

Aluminium is the most common metallic element on earth. Both aluminium adjuvant and saline were used as placebo vaccines in the trials. The incidence of systemic reactions was very low in both groups. Also, safety outcomes are the same in vaccinated and unvaccinated people. Aluminium is used in most vaccines and has an excellent safety record of over 80 years.

\*As with any medication, vaccines carry an extremely rare risk of an anaphylactic reaction. The rate with Gardasil is around three per one million doses. Vaccinators are trained to manage these events.

## **Where can I get further information?**

- New Zealand HPV Project website [www.hpv.org.nz](http://www.hpv.org.nz)
- New Zealand HPV Project Helpline Toll free **0508 11 12 13**
- Your GP, Family Planning Clinic or Sexual Health Clinic

### **Sexually Transmitted Infections Education Foundation**

Copies of this pamphlet are available from:

**STIEF**, PO Box 2437, Shortland Street,  
Auckland 1140, New Zealand

Email: [info@stief.org.nz](mailto:info@stief.org.nz)  
[www.stief.org.nz](http://www.stief.org.nz)

**The New Zealand HPV Project**

[www.hpv.org.nz](http://www.hpv.org.nz)

Helpline toll free: **0508 11 12 13**

Phone: **09 433 6526**



**View our consumer website with information about sexual health and all sexually transmitted infections, including a national database of sexual health providers:**

[www.justthefacts.co.nz](http://www.justthefacts.co.nz)

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