





INTRODUCTION

This booklet serves as a guide for teachers to inform students about the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine, an effective tool to prevent cervical cancer. Teachers often play an important role in explaining the benefits of HPV vaccination, dispelling rumors and myths about the vaccine and responding to any questions and concerns. These efforts by teachers are essential to ensure the success of HPV vaccination programs delivered in schools.

In the Americas, cervical cancer causes more than 34,000 deaths per year.

Informed teachers can help ensure that girls aged 9-14 years are vaccinated against HPV, which is a critical step to end cervical cancer.

WHAT IS CERVICAL CANCER?

Cancer is a disease in which cells multiply uncontrollably. When cancer develops in the cervix, or neck of the uterus, it is called cervical cancer. If the cancer continues to grow, it can spread to other parts of the body, beyond the cervix.

WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF CERVICAL CANCER?

Persistent infection with high-risk types of the human papillomavirus (HPV) is the main cause of cervical cancer.

WHAT IS THE HUMAN PAPILOMAVIRUS?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus, transmitted through skin-to-skin sexual contact. Most people will have an HPV infection during their lifetime, even though they do not know they have it and many may not have any signs or symptoms of infection. Most HPV infections clear on their own.

HOW SIMILAR IS HPV TO HIV?

The two viruses – HPV (human papilloma virus) and HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) – are very different. Infection from HPV is much more common than infection with HIV. Almost everyone who is sexually active becomes infected with HPV at some point in his or her life. HPV lives on the skin and is transmitted when skin touches skin. Meanwhile, HIV lives in body fluids like semen and blood, and is transmitted when those body fluids are exchanged between people; this is the reason that condoms are very effective at preventing HIV when sexual intercourse takes place. However, condoms are not as good at preventing HPV infections because this virus can live on the skin. The best way to prevent HPV infection is by HPV vaccination, recommended in girls aged 9-14 years. There is currently no vaccine available to prevent HIV.

CAN ALL HPV TYPES CAUSE CERVICAL CANCER?

There are over 100 types of HPV. There are low-risk HPV types, many of which cause genital warts. **These are not related to cancer.** There are high-risk HPV types that can cause cervical cancer and other HPV-related cancers. Persistent infection with high-risk HPV can cause precancerous cervical lesions. **If the lesions are not detected and not treated, they can slowly develop into cervical cancer.**



WHAT ARE GENITAL WARTS?

Genital warts are infections of the skin caused by low-risk types of HPV. Genital warts will not develop into cervical cancer, but they may require treatment if they do not go away on their own.

DOES HPV PRODUCE SYMPTOMS?

An HPV infection does not produce symptoms, which is why it is important for women to be screened for cervical cancer. HPV infection will most often disappear on its own, as a result of the body's natural immune response, particularly in younger women.

CAN MEN ALSO BE INFECTED BY HPV?

Yes, men can have an HPV infection, just like women. HPV-related cancers in men, include anal, penile and oral cancers, but these are less common than cervical cancer. Some countries have introduced HPV vaccination in boys.

CAN HPV INFECTION BE PREVENTED?

Yes, HPV vaccines prevent infection from HPV. They are safe and effective and prevent infection from the high-risk HPV types contained in the vaccine, which are the cause of the majority of cervical cancer cases.



DOES THE HPV VACCINE PROTECT AGAINST SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED INFECTIONS?

No. Regardless of having been vaccinated against HPV, women should use the recommended measures to prevent sexually transmitted infections.

WHAT IS THE RECOMMENDED SCHEDULE FOR THE HPV VACCINE?

PAHO/WHO recommends two doses of HPV vaccines in girls aged 9-14 years of age, with the second dose 6 months after the first. Country guidelines may vary. There is no maximum interval between the two doses; however, a range of no greater than 12-15 months is suggested.

HOW LONG WILL THE HPV VACCINE PROTECT AGAINST INFECTION?

The protection conferred by the HPV vaccine is long-lasting.

CAN HPV VACCINES GET RID OF HPV INFECTIONS?

No. An HPV vaccine cannot get rid of HPV infections that may be present when the vaccine is administered, nor can it get rid of precancerous lesions or cervical cancer.

WHO SHOULD RECEIVE THE HPV VACCINE?

PAHO/WHO recommends that girls aged 9-14 years should receive the HPV vaccine for cervical cancer prevention. However, country vaccination guidelines may vary. Some country guidelines include HPV vaccination in boys, as well.

WHAT ARE THE COMMON ADVERSE REACTIONS TO THE HPV VACCINE?

The common adverse reactions to the HPV vaccine are pain and redness at the injection site, fever, headache and nausea. They are usually mild reactions that resolve on their own.

ARE HPV VACCINES SAFE AND EFFECTIVE?

Yes. As with all vaccines, the safety and effectiveness of HPV vaccines is monitored very carefully. Studies have demonstrated the safety and effectiveness of HPV vaccines. In addition, millions of people around the world have received the HPV vaccine, without serious adverse events.

IS IT TRUE THAT MANY GIRLS FAINT AFTER GETTING THE HPV VACCINE?

Adolescents are particularly prone to fainting after any medical procedure, including receiving vaccines, because they are often very nervous about the procedure. To prevent falls and injuries due to fainting, girls receiving the vaccine needs to be seated before, during and for 15 minutes after the vaccine is given.



WHY IS THE HPV VACCINE RECOMMENDED FOR GIRLS AGED 9-14 YEARS?

For the HPV vaccine to be effective, it must be administered before their first sexual contact.

WILL HPV VACCINATION AFFECT FERTILITY? WILL IT BE MORE DIFFICULT FOR VACCINATED GIRLS TO BECOME PREGNANT OR TO CARRY A PREGNANCY TO TERM?

Studies of vaccinated girls have found no evidence that the HPV vaccination affects a girl's future fertility nor that it causes any problems in future pregnancies.



ARE ALL RECOMMENDED DOSES NEEDED FOR A GIRL TO BE FULLY PROTECTED FROM HPV? ISN'T ONE DOSE ENOUGH?

The HPV vaccine requires more than one dose to be effective. Without all the recommended doses, the HPV vaccine might not be completely effective in preventing cervical cancer. It is important that girls receive all recommended doses and observe the minimum and maximum intervals between the doses, to be fully protected.

ARE THERE GIRLS WHO SHOULD NOT BE VACCINATED?

Girls who have an acute illness of moderate or severe intensity should wait until they are well to get vaccinated. Girls who have been previously vaccinated against HPV and have had a severe allergy require a medical evaluation before being vaccinated. Pregnant women should not be vaccinated.



IF A GIRL HAS A COLD, CAN SHE GET VACCINATED?

If at the time of vaccination, the girl has a cold, she can receive the HPV vaccine, since the common cold is not a contraindication for vaccination.

IF A GIRL MISSES SCHOOL ON THE DAY OF HPV VACCINATION, WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Teachers should stress to parents the importance of the HPV vaccine and provide information about options for their daughter to receive this vaccine.





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www.paho.org/end-cervical-cancer