

## **Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination program for grade 8 girls**

### **What is Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?**

HPV is a very common virus that can lead to cancer of the cervix and genital warts.

### **What are the symptoms of HPV?**

Most people never get symptoms and may not know they have been infected with HPV but they still carry the virus and can infect others. However, some infected individuals may develop genital warts. Although usually painless, genital warts can be very difficult to get rid of and may be itchy and uncomfortable.

Though the body's immune system usually gets rid of the virus on its own, in some women the virus can also lead to cervical cancer. There are about 400 deaths in Canada and 140 deaths in Ontario each year from cervical cancer.

### **How can parents protect their daughters against cervical cancer?**

Parents should get their daughters vaccinated. Almost all cervical cancers are caused by HPV. The vaccine is close to 100 per cent effective in preventing four strains of HPV – strains 6, 11, 16 and 18. In Canada, strains 16 and 18 cause 70 per cent of cervical cancer. Strains 6 and 11 cause 90 per cent of genital warts.

The vaccine does not replace the need for regular Pap tests, which are recommended for girls once they become sexually active, nor does it protect against other sexually transmitted infections.

### **Is the vaccine safe?**

Yes. The World Health Organization has been advocating for the vaccine's widespread availability for the past three years. The vaccine has now been approved for use in 80 countries around the world.

The most common side effect is soreness at the injection site. Rarely, other side effects include throat spasms, inflammation or infection of the gastrointestinal tract, swollen glands, high blood pressure, vaginal bleeding and reduced arm movement where the shot was given.

## **Who is funding the program?**

After the federal government approved funding earlier this year, a number of provinces announced HPV vaccine programs. The Ontario government announced funding for public health units to offer the HPV vaccine free of charge to grade 8 females at school-based vaccination clinics. The vaccine is voluntary.

## **Why only to grade 8 girls?**

The provincial government is providing funding for grade 8 girls through school-based clinics only. The HPV vaccine is most effective when given before sexual activity begins, as the virus is most commonly spread during sexual activity by skin to skin contact with an infected person.

Toronto Public Health will be offering the voluntary vaccine to 14,000 grade 8 girls within the city of Toronto. Three doses of the vaccine are required for protection and will be given over the course of the school year. Consent forms and educational materials in 13 languages are being sent home with students in early September.

## **Can other females get the vaccination?**

Yes. The vaccine is approved for use in Canada for females aged 9 to 26. Those who want the vaccine can also get it at their doctor's office at a total cost of \$400 to \$500 for all three shots.

## **For more information:**

For more information or a vaccination clinic schedule, visit [www.toronto.ca/health](http://www.toronto.ca/health). Parents with questions can call the Toronto Public Health Immunization Information Line, 416-392-1250.