

STIEF 

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# HPV vaccination:

Preventing HPV and  
HPV-related cancers



# Facts about HPV (Human Papillomavirus)

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- HPV is a common virus that can cause cancers in people of all genders.
- 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 HPV types that cause several cancers, including:

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

The HPV vaccine also protects against HPV types that cause **genital warts**.

*Vaccination is not a substitute for cervical screening. This vaccine protects against most, but not all, HPV types that cause cervical cancer. You should still have regular cervical screening.*

## 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. In New Zealand, the HPV vaccine is licensed for use in females and males aged 9-45 years.

There is no adequate evidence for the safety of the HPV vaccine in pregnant people. However, there have been no reports to date of complications in those who have received the Gardasil 9 vaccine during pregnancy. If you are pregnant, we recommend having a conversation with your midwife or obstetrician about the vaccine.

## How effective is the vaccine?

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Vaccination is highly effective and immunity is longlasting. All doses are required for protection (2 or 3 depending on age at vaccination) but 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 worldwide. 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 if there is HPV present.*

## 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 long lasting 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 anyone aged 9–45 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. This includes non-residents under the age of 18.
- Gardasil 9 is offered to students in Year 7 or 8 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 9 is available free of charge through their health care provider.

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

People outside the funded groups can pay for the vaccine. The cost of each dose is approximately \$180.00 and there is usually an appointment cost on top of this. This means the cost will be around \$650.00 for the full three doses.

Your Family Doctor, Nurse Practitioner or Primary Health Care Nurse will be able to give you more information on the cost of the vaccine.

## Why are both males and females 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 anal, penile and throat cancers caused by HPV. Therefore, it is beneficial for everyone to receive these vaccinations.

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

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No, HPV testing is not required before vaccination. 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.

## 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 infections and cancers caused by HPV.
- 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 easy and well worth your time.

\*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.

For more information and supporting references addressing the facts above:

visit [immune.org.nz](https://www.immune.org.nz)

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

# HPV Vaccine

## More key facts

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

The HPV vaccine is not different or special compared to other common vaccines. Extensive research with millions of participants shows that Gardasil 9 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.

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

It has been suggested that the vaccine can make 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 pregnancy outcomes**

Studies show the same rate of pregnancy and births occur in vaccinated and unvaccinated females. 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.

### **Protecting a child by early HPV vaccination does not influence their future sexual behaviour**

There is no evidence that the HPV vaccine administered through the school-based programme (at 11 or 12 years old) has any bearing on when a person becomes sexually active, or frequency of sexual activity.

### **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 from 9 years of age**

The clinical trials included girls and boys 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.

Produced in conjunction with:



**HEAD AND NECK**  
CANCER FOUNDATION OF AOTEAROA

## Where can I get further information?

- New Zealand HPV Project website **hpv.org.nz**
- New Zealand HPV Project Helpline Toll free **0508 11 12 13**
- Your primary health provider, Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa 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

**info@stief.org.nz**  
**stief.org.nz**

**The New Zealand HPV Project**

**hpv.org.nz**

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

Phone: **09 433 6526**



**View our sexual health website for rangatahi, including a  
national database of sexual health providers:**

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

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