

## HPV and Adolescents: Navigating Vaccination Recommendations

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### DESCRIPTION

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections globally, affecting millions of people each year. While the virus can impact individuals of all ages, adolescents represent a critical demographic for intervention due to the significant health benefits associated with early HPV vaccination. This article explores the importance of HPV vaccination among adolescents, navigating the recommendations, addressing concerns, and highlighting the broader implications for public health.

### Understanding HPV and its risks

HPV is a group of related viruses, and over 200 different types have been identified. Some strains of HPV can cause genital warts, while others are linked to various cancers, including cervical, anal, penile, and oropharyngeal cancers. Adolescents are particularly vulnerable to HPV infection due to the onset of sexual activity during puberty. Thus, targeting this age group for vaccination is a crucial strategy in preventing the long-term health consequences associated with HPV.

**The HPV vaccines:** Currently, there are three FDA-approved vaccines for HPV: Gardasil 9, Gardasil, and Cervarix. Gardasil 9 is the most widely used and protects against the nine most common high-risk HPV types. These vaccines have demonstrated remarkable efficacy in preventing HPV-related diseases, especially when administered before exposure to the virus through sexual activity.

**Navigating vaccination recommendations:** The vaccination recommendations for adolescents are often guided by public health agencies and medical professionals. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends routine HPV vaccination for both boys and girls at age 11 or 12. Vaccination can be started as early as age 9 and is also recommended for catch-up vaccination up to age 26 for those who were not vaccinated earlier. One of the key aspects of navigating vaccination recommendations is addressing parental concerns. Some parents may be hesitant about vaccinating their adolescents due to misconceptions or fears about potential side effects. It is crucial for healthcare providers to engage in open

and informative discussions, emphasizing the safety and effectiveness of the HPV vaccine. Research consistently supports the safety of HPV vaccines, with side effects typically being mild and temporary.

### Benefits of early vaccination

Early HPV vaccination offers several benefits for adolescents. Firstly, it provides protection against high-risk HPV strains before the onset of sexual activity, ensuring maximum effectiveness. By preventing infections during this critical period, the vaccines reduce the risk of developing HPV-related cancers later in life. Secondly, early vaccination contributes to the concept of herd immunity.

As more adolescents receive the HPV vaccine, the overall prevalence of the virus decreases in the population, providing indirect protection to those who may not be vaccinated. This collective immunity is crucial for reducing the transmission of HPV and lowering the overall disease burden. Furthermore, timely vaccination minimizes the need for catch-up vaccination in later years. Catch-up vaccination may be less effective, and individuals who delay vaccination are at a higher risk of acquiring an HPV infection before receiving the vaccine.

### Addressing challenges and concerns

Despite the proven benefits of HPV vaccination, challenges persist in achieving optimal vaccination rates among adolescents. Some common challenges include a lack of awareness about the vaccine, financial barriers, and vaccine hesitancy driven by misinformation. Health education campaigns targeted at parents, adolescents, and healthcare providers can help address awareness gaps. Providing accurate information about the safety and efficacy of the HPV vaccine is crucial in dispelling myths and misconceptions. Additionally, efforts to make the vaccine more accessible through school-based vaccination programs and public health initiatives can help overcome financial barriers. Overcoming vaccine hesitancy involves fostering trust in the medical community and addressing concerns openly. Healthcare providers play a central role in this process by engaging in empathetic and informative discussions with parents and adolescents,

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addressing specific concerns and emphasizing the long-term health benefits of vaccination.

### **Public health impact**

Achieving high HPV vaccination rates among adolescents has substantial implications for public health. Increased vaccination coverage can significantly reduce the incidence of HPV-related cancers and associated healthcare costs. By preventing infections early in life, the overall burden of HPV-related diseases can be curtailed, leading to improved population health outcomes. Furthermore, successful HPV vaccination programs contribute to broader public health goals, such as reducing health disparities and promoting equity in healthcare access. Ensuring that all adolescents, regardless of socioeconomic background, have access to and receive the HPV vaccine is essential for achieving these goals.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, navigating HPV vaccination recommendations for adolescents is a critical aspect of public health efforts to prevent HPV-related diseases. Early vaccination offers substantial benefits, including protection against high-risk HPV strains and a reduction in the overall prevalence of the virus.

Overcoming challenges such as vaccine hesitancy and financial barriers requires a collaborative effort from healthcare providers, public health agencies, and communities. As we continue to prioritize HPV vaccination among adolescents, it is imperative to encourage awareness, address concerns, and promote inclusivity in vaccine access. By doing so, we can make significant strides in reducing the burden of HPV-related diseases and improving the long-term health outcomes of the adolescent population and the broader community.