

Immunise against HPV

(Human Papillomavirus)

Helps prevent cancers caused by HPV infection

Information for young people and
their families and whānau



immunise

your best protection

Human papillomavirus (HPV) immunisation helps protect against a virus that causes several cancers affecting both men and women.

The HPV vaccine is available free for everyone aged 9–26 years.

What is HPV?

- HPV is a very common virus that is spread through intimate skin to skin contact. Most people become infected at some time during their life.
- Most HPV infections get better on their own and don't cause any obvious problems. Sometimes they don't get better, and can cause cell changes in the body that can lead to cancer later in life.

What cancers are caused by HPV?

- HPV causes most cervical cancer, which is cancer of the lower part of the uterus or womb. Abnormal cells grow on the cervix, which can develop into cancer if they are not detected and removed.
 - Regular cervical screening is important to prevent the small proportion of cervical cancers that aren't covered by the vaccine.
- HPV can cause throat and mouth cancers, which are more common in men than women. HPV can also cause cancer of the anus, vagina, vulva and penis.
- Some types of HPV cause genital warts.



NEARLY 8/10 PEOPLE

will be exposed to HPV in their lifetime

How does immunisation protect against cancer?

The vaccine works by causing the body's immune system to produce its own protection (antibodies) against the HPV types most likely to cause cancer or genital warts.

If an immunised person comes into contact with HPV, the antibodies in their blood will fight the virus and protect them against being infected.

It usually takes several weeks after vaccination to develop protection against HPV.

The vaccine cannot cause HPV infection or cancer.

At what age should people be immunised against HPV?

The vaccine is recommended to be given to children aged 11–12 years, but it's free for those aged 9–26 years.

- Those aged 9–14 years need two doses of the vaccine, at least six months apart.



- Those aged 15 years and older need three doses of the vaccine, spaced over six months.

The vaccine is more effective when it's given at a younger age, for two reasons.

- Those vaccinated at a younger age have a stronger immune response to protect against infection.
- The vaccine *prevents* infection – it doesn't *treat* it. This means it's less effective in people who have already been exposed to HPV through sexual contact.

Children are offered the vaccine at most schools, usually in Year 8. The vaccine is also available free from general practices and some other health centres.

How effective is the vaccine?

- The vaccine is very effective in preventing infection from the nine HPV types that are most likely to cause cancer and genital warts.
- Over the last decade, disease caused by HPV has fallen significantly among young people in countries offering HPV immunisation.
- Protection from the vaccine is long-lasting and is not expected to wear off over time.

50+ DIE FROM HPV
NEW ZEALANDERS CANCERS
EVERY YEAR




How safe is the vaccine?

- HPV immunisation has an excellent safety profile similar to any other childhood vaccine.
- A sore arm and redness, pain or swelling at the injection site are common. Fever, headache, nausea and fainting are less common.
- Very rarely, a severe allergic reaction, or anaphylaxis, can occur soon after vaccination. If this does occur, it can be effectively treated by the nurse. For this reason, people will be asked to wait for 20 minutes after vaccination.

Who should not be immunised?

- Anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to yeast or any other component of the vaccine should not receive the vaccine. If you are unsure, please talk to your doctor or practice nurse.
- Pregnant women should delay being vaccinated, as the safety of the vaccine in pregnancy is unknown. Studies have not found any safety concerns among pregnant women who have been vaccinated.

The National Immunisation Register

- Immunisations are recorded on the National Immunisation Register (NIR) so that reminders for further doses can be sent and health professionals can find out what immunisations should be given, even if people change GPs.
 - The information can also be used to check the impact of the vaccine programme on cancer rates.
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Where can I get more information?

For more information, talk to your doctor, practice nurse or health clinic; visit www.health.govt.nz/hpv or phone **0800 IMMUNE (0800 466 863)**.

Information about the National Cervical Screening Programme is available on the National Screening Unit's website at www.nsu.govt.nz.

This resource is available from health.govt.nz or the Authorised Provider at your DHB. December 2016. 10/2019. **HE2012**

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