

Catch Up Now: Protect Preteens from HPV-Associated Cancers

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, well-child visits and annual physicals, including visits for routine vaccinations, were largely put on hold to prioritize urgent needs and reduce the risk of the spread of COVID-19. This led to a significant drop in childhood and adolescent vaccinations, including vaccinations for the prevention of HPV infection that can lead to six types of cancers.¹ According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP), the HPV vaccine is recommended for preteen boys and girls at age 11 or 12 because it provides protection before exposure to the virus and produces a more robust immune response during the preteen years.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, HPV vaccination lagged behind other adolescent vaccinations. While tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis (Tdap), meningococcal conjugate, and HPV vaccines are routinely recommended for adolescents, 2019 Maryland data show a greater than 30% higher vaccination rate for meningococcal disease than for HPV, despite its safety and efficacy in preventing HPV.² This gap in coverage represents missed opportunities to vaccinate preteens with the HPV vaccine at the same time as other routinely recommended vaccines. Recent studies show that a patient who receives a strong provider recommendation is four to five times more likely to receive the HPV vaccine.

With stay-at-home orders lifted, it is essential that families be invited back into health systems, clinics, and offices to protect their children from deadly, vaccine-preventable diseases. This includes the HPV vaccine which is essential in preventing HPV-associated cancers.

The American Academy of Pediatrics and the CDC also recommend the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine for those ages 12 and older. In addition to recently recommending the vaccine's use for adolescents, the CDC updated its clinical guidance to allow COVID-19 vaccines to be administered at the same time as other routine vaccinations.³ The CDC published this official recommendation in a Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report released May 14, 2021.⁴

¹ American Cancer Society. Getting Essential Childhood and Adolescent Vaccines during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

<https://www.cancer.org/healthy/hpv-vaccine/vaccination-during-covid.html>. Accessed May 19, 2021.

² Center for Disease Control and Prevention. National Immunization Survey. TeenVaxView.

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/coverage/teenvaxview/index.html>.

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Vaccines and Immunizations. COVID-19 Vaccines.

https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/covid-19/info-by-product/clinical-considerations.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fvaccines%2Fcovid-19%2Finfo-by-product%2Fpfizer%2Fclinical-considerations.html#Coadministration. Accessed May 19, 2021.

⁴ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR). The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices' Interim Recommendation for Use of Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 Vaccine in Adolescents Aged 12-15 Years – United States, May 2021.

<https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/70/wr/mm7020e1.htm>. Accessed May 19, 2021.

For adolescents receiving the COVID-19 vaccine, co-administration of the COVID-19 vaccine with other routine adolescent vaccinations, including the HPV vaccine, should help health care providers catch-up on vaccinations. Parents are encouraged to ensure children are up to date on all routine immunizations.

Below, please find a selection of materials, developed by the CDC or National HPV Vaccination Roundtable, to assist you in your efforts to increase HPV vaccination awareness. The fact sheets may be used by providers in conversations with parents and the video and radio public service announcements (PSAs) may be used in provider office waiting rooms. These materials are available at no cost by visiting <https://phpa.health.maryland.gov/cancer/Pages/HPV.aspx> or by visiting the individual links listed in the table below.

Fact Sheet for Parents (English and Spanish) https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/partners/teens/fact-sheets.html
30 second PSA video about HPV (English and Spanish) https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/partners/outreach-parents/materials-parents.html <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Click on “Video and Audio Resources”• Scroll down for the HPV vaccine PSAs
Various Video and Radio PSAs and podcasts (English and Spanish) https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/partners/teens/video-audio.html#podcasts
National HPV Roundtable Clinical and Health System Action Guides Clinical Guides <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Physicians, Physician Assistants & Nurse Practitioners http://hpvroundtable.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/PROVIDERS-Action-Guide-WEB.pdf• Nurses & Medical Assistants http://hpvroundtable.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/RNMA-Action-Guide-WEB.pdf• Dentists & Hygienists http://hpvroundtable.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/DENTAL-Action-Guide-WEB.pdf• Office Administrative Staff Teams http://hpvroundtable.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/OFFICE-TEAMS-Action-Guide-WEB.pdf Systems Guides <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Small Private Practices http://hpvroundtable.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/SMALL-PRACTICES-Action-Guide-WEB.pdf• Large Health Systems http://hpvroundtable.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/LARGE-SYSTEMS-Action-Guide-WEB.pdf