



COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA

Department of Health

PO BOX 2448
RICHMOND, VA 23218

TTY 7-1-1 OR
1-800-828-1120

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Dear Parents of Rising Sixth Graders:

The 2007 Virginia General Assembly passed a law that requires rising sixth grade girls to receive the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine series. The law also requires the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) to provide parents of rising sixth graders with information about the vaccine. In 2011, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) made an additional recommendation that boys of the same age routinely receive HPV vaccine.

Health care providers diagnose about 40,000 new cases of cancer related to HPV each year. As State Health Commissioner, I know that you make many decisions to keep your children free from disease. We want to keep your child free from diseases too. The HPV vaccine can help protect your child from nine HPV-associated cancers including cervical cancer in women, and cancers found in the mouth and back of the throat in men. The HPV vaccine works best when it is given to a child *prior* to exposure to the virus. Just as having your children buckle up or wear a helmet when biking protects their health, the HPV vaccine protects children from HPV-associated cancer that may develop later in their life.

Please review the information provided on the reverse side of this letter. The HPV vaccine is safe and can help protect your child from cancer. After reading the information, a parent/guardian may choose their child not receive the HPV vaccine for school entry. However, VDH strongly recommends that children be vaccinated per CDC recommendations. Please contact your health care provider to determine when your child can receive the vaccine series and discuss any questions you have. HPV vaccine is available from your doctor, military clinics, or local health departments. You may provide documentation to your child's school to update your child's school immunization record.

Should you have additional questions, please contact Tira Hanrahan, Adolescent Immunization Coordinator at the Virginia Department of Health, by telephone at (804) 864-8073, or by email at Tira.Hanrahan@vdh.virginia.gov or Tracey White, School Health Nurse Specialist, Office of Student Services, Virginia Department of Education, by telephone at (804) 786-8571, or by email at Tracey.White@doe.virginia.gov.

Sincerely,

M. Norman Oliver, MD, MA
Acting State Health Commissioner

HPV Q/A

What is HPV?

HPV stands for Human Papillomavirus Virus, which is a common virus that is spread through intimate skin-to-skin contact (vaginal, anal or oral sex) with someone who has the virus. HPV can be passed to others even when an infected person has no signs or symptoms. You can develop symptoms years after being infected, making it hard to know when you first became infected. In most cases, HPV goes away on its own and does not cause any health problems. However when HPV does not go away, the infection can cause cervical, vaginal, vulvar, penile, anus, and oropharyngeal cancers (back of the throat)². The HPV vaccine can prevent infections with the types of HPV that most commonly cause cancer in men and women¹.

Why is HPV vaccine recommended at age 11-12 years?

For HPV vaccine to be most effective, the series should be given before exposure to HPV. CDC recommends that the HPV vaccine be administered during the same age that is already recommended to receive the Tetanus, Diphtheria and Pertussis booster dose; however, the vaccine is approved to be administered as young as 9 years old. This way, a child is protected prior to exposure to the virus later in life. Similar to when your children wears a seatbelt or a helmet to prevent injury in an accident, the HPV vaccine helps keep children free from HPV-associated cancers.

How many doses is the HPV vaccine series?

When a child receives the vaccine at 11 or 12 years old, they only need two doses. If your child receives the first dose of vaccine at 15 years old or older then s/he will need three doses. There is no reason to wait to vaccinate your child. Preteens should receive all recommended doses of the HPV vaccine series before exposure later in life.

How common are HPV infections?

Approximately 79 million Americans are currently infected with HPV. Approximately 14 million people become newly infected each year². HPV is so common that most sexually-active men and women will get at least one type of HPV at some point in their lives¹.

How common are cancers related to HPV?

Approximately 40,000 Americans get cancer caused by HPV every year¹. HPV causes more than 90% of all cervical cancer⁵. Cervical cancer is the most common HPV-associated cancer among women in the United States and one of the leading causes of cancer deaths among women around the world⁴. In the U.S., more than 11,000 women get cervical cancer every year³. In the U.S., recent studies show that as much as 70% of cancer of the back of the throat in men are linked to HPV⁵. HPV also causes over 90% of anal and more than 60% of penile cancer.

Does the HPV vaccine work?

HPV vaccines work extremely well. Clinical trials showed HPV vaccines provide close to 100% protection against cervical precancers. Since the first HPV vaccine was recommended in 2006, there has been a 64% reduction in vaccine-type HPV infections among teen girls in the United States². In other countries, such as Australia, where HPV vaccination coverage is higher than in the United States, large decreases have been observed in HPV-associated infections². HPV vaccines offer long-lasting protection against HPV infection and HPV disease. There has been no evidence to suggest that HPV vaccine loses any ability to provide protection over time. Data are available for about 10 years of follow-up after vaccination.

Is the HPV vaccine safe?

Like all vaccines, HPV vaccine is monitored on an ongoing basis to make sure it remains safe and effective. The United States currently has the safest, most effective vaccine supply in history. Years of testing are required by law to ensure the safety of vaccines before they are made available for use in the United States. This process can take ten years or longer. Once a vaccine is in use, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) monitor any associated side effects or possible side effects (adverse events) through the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System and other vaccine safety systems. No serious safety concerns were identified in these clinical trials. FDA only licenses a vaccine if it is safe, effective, and the benefits outweigh the risks. CDC and FDA continue to monitor HPV vaccines to make sure they are safe and beneficial for the public².

¹ Human Papillomavirus, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, What is HPV? <https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/whatishpv.html>

² Human Papillomavirus, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Questions and Answers <https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/questions-answers.html>

³ Human Papillomavirus, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Genital HPV Infection Fact Sheet <https://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/stdfact-hpv.htm>

⁴ Global Health Stories, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Increasing Cervical Cancer Screening Coverage in the United States and Abroad https://www.cdc.gov/globalhealth/stories/cervical_cancer.htm

⁵ HPV and Cancer, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, HPV and Cancer <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/hpv/statistics/index.htm>