

# HPV VAX NOW

# IN YOUR CLINIC

A Guide to Improving HPV Vaccination  
Rates Among Patients Ages 18–26

Prepared by the U.S. Department of  
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## Introduction

Nearly 80 million Americans are infected with human papillomavirus (HPV).<sup>1</sup> While HPV usually goes away on its own, certain high-risk HPVs are known to cause cancer if not treated. HPV is known to cause up to 35,000 cases of cancer in men and women each year.<sup>2</sup>

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that all boys and girls get the HPV vaccine at ages 11–12 for protection against HPV-related cancers. For those who did not complete the series when they were younger, the HPV vaccine is recommended for all men and women through age 26. Despite the availability of this cancer prevention vaccine, vaccination rates remain suboptimal across the United States, with only about half of adolescents fully vaccinated against HPV.<sup>3</sup> Numerous efforts to increase vaccination during adolescence have achieved important successes in raising rates and protecting children against future cancers. Less focus has been placed on the young adults who were not vaccinated when they were younger but still have the chance to get the HPV vaccine and be protected against HPV-related cancers. Only about 50% of women and 20% of men ages 19–26 reported receiving at least one dose of the HPV vaccine,<sup>4</sup> leaving far too many young adults at risk for HPV infection and HPV-related cancers.

## About This Guide

**Everyone in your practice plays an important role in protecting patients against HPV-related cancers with the HPV vaccine.**

This guide is informed by a review of the latest research, message testing with young adults and healthcare providers, and insights from practicing providers and public health experts around how to communicate effectively about the HPV vaccine. In this guide, you'll find tools to help you improve HPV vaccination rates among your young adult patients.

The guide includes 2 key resources:

- **HPV Vaccine and Young Adults: Information for Healthcare Providers.** Includes information about HPV vaccination for young adults, guidance on how to make an effective recommendation for the HPV vaccine, and responses to frequently asked questions from young adults about HPV vaccination.
- **HPV Vaccine and Young Adults: Guidance for Clinical Practices.** Includes actionable steps and resources that practices can use to improve HPV vaccination rates among young adult patients.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/about-hpv.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/hpv/statistics/cases.htm>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/partners/outreach-hcp/hpv-coverage.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/coverage/adultvaxview/pubsresources/NHIS-2017.html#box3>



# HPV Vaccination and Young Adults: Information for Healthcare Providers

**It's not too late to protect your young adult patients against HPV-related cancers.**

The HPV vaccine is the best way to protect your patients against 6 types of cancer. The vaccine is recommended for all men and women through age 26 who didn't complete the series when they were younger. Recommend the HPV vaccine to all young adult patients every time they visit.

## Why do young adults need the HPV vaccine?

- **HPV is common.** 1 in 4 Americans — or nearly 80 million people — have HPV. Most people with HPV are in their late teens or early 20s.<sup>1,2</sup>
- **HPV causes cancer.** HPV causes about 35,000 cases of cancer every year in men and women, and there's no way to know when HPV will lead to cancer. The good news is that the HPV vaccine could prevent 90% of these cancers from ever developing.
- **Most young adults are not fully vaccinated.** Only about 50% of young women and about 20% of young men have gotten the HPV vaccine.<sup>3</sup>



Heather Hazzan, SELF Magazine

CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends HPV vaccination through age 26 for men and women who did not complete the HPV vaccine series when they were younger.

After age 26, some adults may benefit from vaccination. ACIP encourages shared clinical decision-making for HPV vaccination in adults 27 through 45. Read the full recommendation: [cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/hpv/hcp/recommendations.html](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/hpv/hcp/recommendations.html).

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/stdfact-hpv.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/index.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/imz-managers/coverage/adultvaxview/pubs-resources/NHIS-2017.html#box3>



## Make an effective recommendation for the HPV vaccine

A strong provider recommendation for the HPV vaccine makes it 35 times more likely that a young adult will get the HPV vaccine.<sup>4</sup> Talk about the HPV vaccine with all male and female patients through age 26. And talk about it at every clinical opportunity, including well, sick, and chronic care visits.

### Every effective HPV vaccination recommendation has 2 key parts:

- Recommend the HPV vaccine in the same way that you recommend other routine vaccines for patients ages 18 through 26, like the flu vaccine.
- Use a statement that assumes your patient will get vaccinated, sometimes called a presumptive statement, to motivate your patients to get vaccinated at the current visit instead of waiting for a follow-up visit. For example, you can say, *“Today you’re due for your first dose of the HPV vaccine. Do you have any questions?”*

### Make sure young adults ages 18 to 26 know the benefits of getting vaccinated before they turn 27:

- Emphasize the HPV vaccine’s importance in protecting your patients’ current and future health:
  - HPV is common, and some strains of HPV can cause cancer.
  - The HPV vaccine can prevent 6 types of cancer caused by HPV, including cervical cancer, throat cancer, penile cancer, vaginal cancer, anal cancer, and vulvar cancer. The HPV vaccine could prevent 90% of these cancers from ever developing.
  - The HPV vaccine can also prevent genital warts.
  - The sooner young adults get the HPV vaccine, the better protected they are against HPV-related cancers.

- Help patients understand the cost of not completing the HPV vaccine series before they turn 27:
  - HPV-related cancers are expensive and difficult to treat. The HPV vaccine is inexpensive and easy to get.
  - The HPV vaccine is free for most young adults who have health insurance. After age 26, the vaccine can cost hundreds of dollars.
  - Cost-saving options are available to those who don’t have health insurance. Visit [hhs.gov/immunization/get-vaccinated/pay/index.html](https://hhs.gov/immunization/get-vaccinated/pay/index.html) for more information.

Know the dosing schedule for patients ages 18–26: [cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/imz/adult.html#note-hpv](https://cdc.gov/vaccines/schedules/hcp/imz/adult.html#note-hpv).

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/26297720>



## Answering Young Adults' Questions About the HPV Vaccine

*Why do I need the HPV vaccine? Isn't it for kids?*

The HPV vaccine is typically recommended for pre-teens. But if you didn't get it when you were younger, you need to get it now so you're protected against the HPV infections that cause cancer and genital warts. And the sooner you get it, the better it protects you against HPV-related problems. That's why we need to start the shot series today.

*Why do men need the HPV vaccine?*

HPV can cause cancer and genital warts in men. While HPV infections usually go away on their own, infections that don't go away can lead to genital warts and many types of cancer, including penile cancer, anal cancer, and throat cancer. Most men who get HPV never develop symptoms, and there's no test for HPV in men. So it's very important that you get the HPV vaccine today to protect your health.

*Do I still need the HPV vaccine if I'm already sexually active?*

Yes. It's still important to get the vaccine if you're sexually active because the vaccine protects against several types of the HPV virus. So even if you've been infected with 1 type of HPV, the vaccine can still protect you against other types. And the sooner you get the vaccine, the better it protects you against HPV-related cancers.

*I'm not having sex. Do I still need the HPV vaccine?*

Yes. The HPV vaccine works best when you get it *before* you're exposed to HPV. That's why it's better to get the HPV vaccine sooner rather than later — it can protect you before you ever come in contact with HPV.

*I've already had HPV. Do I still need the vaccine?*

Yes. The current vaccine protects against 9 types of HPV, including the types that cause most HPV cancers. So even if you've been infected with 1 type of HPV, the HPV vaccine can still protect you against other cancer-causing types. That's why it's important you get the vaccine today.

*Why do I need to get the HPV vaccine before I turn 27? Can't it wait?*

The younger you are when you get the HPV vaccine, the better it works. And if you get the vaccine now, you may be able to get it for free or at a low cost.

*How many shots do I need?*

It depends on whether you've had any shots, or doses, of the HPV vaccine before — and how old you were when you got those doses.

*If patient has not received any doses:* Since you haven't had any doses of the HPV vaccine yet, you'll need 3 total shots over several weeks. We can get started today.

*If the patient has received 1 dose at age 15 or older:* Since you got 1 dose of the vaccine already, you only need 2 more shots. We can give you 1 of those shots today, and you'll come back for the final shot in about 3 months.

*If the patient has received 1 dose at age 14 or younger:* Since you got 1 dose of the vaccine when you were younger, you only need 1 more shot. We can finish the series today.

*How much does the HPV vaccine cost? What if I can't afford it?*

Most health insurance plans cover the cost of the HPV vaccine. If you don't have insurance, you may still be able to get the vaccine for free or at a low cost. You can find information on how to pay for the vaccine at [hhs.gov/immunization/get-vaccinated/pay/index.html](https://www.hhs.gov/immunization/get-vaccinated/pay/index.html)

*Is the HPV vaccine safe? Are there side effects?*

The HPV vaccine is very safe. Like any medicine, vaccines can cause side effects, including pain, swelling, or redness where you get the shot. Those side effects are normal, and they should go away in a day or 2. Fainting can also happen after any medical procedure, including vaccinations.



# HPV Vaccination and Young Adults: Guidance for Clinical Practices

Everyone in a clinical practice plays an important role in protecting patients against HPV-related cancers with the HPV vaccine. In this resource, you'll find strategies to:

- Get your whole practice team on board
- Make the most of every clinical opportunity
- Make it easier for young adults to get their next HPV vaccine dose
- Provide guidance about payment

## Get your whole practice team on board

It's important that your whole practice team — including nurses, front office staff, and office administrators — knows why young adults need to get the HPV vaccine if they didn't get it when they were younger. This will ensure that your practice sends a clear message to your young adult patients to get the HPV vaccine now.

- Let office staff know their voice is powerful — they can influence whether a young adult chooses to protect themselves against cancer.
- Make sure your team is familiar with the [HPV vaccine recommendation for young adults<sup>1</sup>](https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/hpv/hcp/recommendations.html) and why it's important that they get the vaccine before



age 27. Use these key points to communicate the importance of HPV vaccination for young adults:

- Only about 50% of young women and about 20% of young men have gotten the HPV vaccine.
- HPV causes about 35,000 cases of cancer every year in men and women — and the HPV vaccine can prevent 90% of these cancers from ever developing.
- There's still time to protect young adult patients against HPV-related cancers.

## Understanding Your Young Adult Patients

Keep in mind that your young adult patients may have a lot going on in their lives. They could be making their own healthcare decisions for the first time in their lives. This is also an uncertain time, and young adults may feel additional stresses as they transition to adulthood. Preventing cancer is unlikely to be top of mind. So let them know why the HPV vaccine is important and recommend the HPV vaccine to all your young adult patients.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/hpv/hcp/recommendations.html>



## Make the most of every clinical opportunity

Every clinical encounter with a young adult is an opportunity to recommend the HPV vaccine.

- Assess the immunization status of all patients before every visit.
  - Use your state's [immunization information system \(IIS\)](#)<sup>2</sup> to identify your patient's vaccination status. You can also integrate IIS into your office's electronic health record (EHR).
  - Make HPV vaccination status a standard question in new patient paperwork. If patients don't know whether they have started or completed the HPV vaccine series, help them locate their [vaccine records](#)<sup>3</sup> before their first appointment.
- Strongly recommend the HPV vaccine to young adult patients at every clinical opportunity — including well, sick, and chronic care visits.
  - Add prompts to your EHR documents to remind providers to discuss the HPV vaccine with patients. You can start the conversation by saying, *"I see from your health record that you need the HPV vaccine today."*
- Bundle your HPV vaccination recommendation with your recommendation for other vaccines for young adults, like the flu vaccine.
- Give the HPV vaccine to all qualifying patients.
  - Make use of [standing orders](#)<sup>4</sup> to allow nurses and other non-physician healthcare providers to give the HPV vaccine during appointments.
  - If your office does not stock the HPV vaccine, know where to refer patients to get vaccinated. Use this tool, available at [hhs.gov/immunization/get-vaccinated/where/index.html](https://www.hhs.gov/immunization/get-vaccinated/where/index.html) to help young adults find out where to get vaccinated.

## Make it easy for young adults to get their next HPV vaccine dose

Young adults are busy — and they may not put cancer prevention at the top of their to-do list.

- Schedule the next visit before they leave.
  - Instead of (or in addition to) using appointment cards, ask young adult patients to add their next appointment to their phone calendar.
  - Follow each appointment with an email appointment reminder that includes an iCal, Gmail, or Outlook invitation so patients can easily add the next appointment to their calendars.
- Use reminder-recall systems to let patients know when it's time for their next dose. Reminder-recall systems often make use of direct phone calls or mail reminder cards, but you may find it more effective to reach young adults through text, email, and patient portals.
  - Have patients opt in to text message reminders so your office can send a text when patients are due for their next dose.
  - Schedule automatic email reminders to send to patients in advance of their next HPV vaccination appointment.
  - If your office uses patient portals, send email reminders through the portal to patients before their next HPV vaccination appointment.
  - Use email and patient portal reminders to reinforce the importance of the HPV vaccine. For example, the reminder can read, *"All young adults through age 26 need to complete the HPV vaccine series to be protected against HPV-related cancers and genital warts. Schedule an appointment to get your next HPV vaccine dose to protect yourself."*

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/programs/iis/contacts-locate-records.html#state>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/adults/vaccination-records.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.immunize.org/standing-orders/>



- Make it easy for young adults to fit vaccination into their schedules.
  - Hold vaccination clinics with special hours (e.g., evenings and weekends) at your practice to give busy young adults more opportunities to get the HPV vaccine.
  - Have a list ready of locations with flexible hours — like pharmacies or [Federally Qualified Health Centers \(FQHCs\)](#)<sup>5</sup> — where you can refer young adults to get additional doses of the HPV vaccine. Use this tool, available at [hhs.gov/immunization/get-vaccinated/where/index.html](https://hhs.gov/immunization/get-vaccinated/where/index.html), to help young adults find out where they can get the HPV vaccine.

## Additional resources

- CDC Adult Vaccination Resources: Standards for Practice [cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/adults/for-practice/standards/referral.html](https://cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/adults/for-practice/standards/referral.html)
- CDC Adult Vaccination Resources: Strategies for Increasing Adult Vaccination Rates [cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/adults/for-practice/increasing-vacc-rates.html](https://cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/adults/for-practice/increasing-vacc-rates.html)
- American Medical Association CME: Adult Vaccinations: Team-Based Immunization [edhub.ama-assn.org/steps-forward/module/2702553](https://edhub.ama-assn.org/steps-forward/module/2702553)

## Provide guidance about payment

Young adults transitioning from their families' health insurance may need information about insurance coverage for the HPV vaccine and cost-saving options.

- Work with your office staff to create ready-to-go answers for young adults' questions about insurance coverage.
- Refer patients to an FQHC if needed.
- Direct patients without health insurance to [hhs.gov/immunization/get-vaccinated/pay/index.html](https://hhs.gov/immunization/get-vaccinated/pay/index.html) for information about different ways to pay for vaccines.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov/>