

Cancer Prevention Through HPV Vaccination: An Action Guide for Dental Health Care Providers



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You have the power to reduce the incidence of human papillomavirus (HPV) cancers and pre-cancers among patients in your care. **HPV cancer prevention starts with you.**

Oral health professionals play a critical role in combating growing rates of HPV-positive oropharyngeal cancers, which affect the tonsils and the base of the tongue. **Oral health professionals should strongly and clearly recommend HPV vaccination to all age-eligible patients.**

The Problem

HPV-positive oropharyngeal cancer has surpassed cervical cancer as the most prevalent HPV cancer. Certain strains of HPV cause 70% of oropharyngeal cancers in the U.S., affecting about 11,600 people each year. One in nine American men have oral HPV,ⁱ and cancers of the oropharynx are about four times more common in men than women.ⁱⁱ Oral HPV has been detected in newborns when the mother has an HPV cervical infection,ⁱⁱⁱ and research shows that 2.5% of adolescents have HPV.^{iv} Although most cases of HPV resolve without incident, HPV causes about 31,500 cases of cancer in men and women each year in the U.S., including cancers in the oropharynx, cervix, vagina, vulva, penis, and anus.^v

HPV is linked with:

70%

of oropharynx, vaginal, and vulvar cancers

90%

of cervical and anal cancers

60%

of penile cancers^{vi}

The Solution

The HPV vaccine is cancer prevention. Boys and girls should get the HPV vaccine series at age 11 or 12. The vaccine can be given starting as early as age 9. The HPV vaccine is most effective when given before age 13 to achieve the best immune response, and it provides long-lasting protection.^{ix} For patients who were not vaccinated on time at 11-12, vaccination may be provided up to age 26 for females and males.

HPV vaccination works. The HPV vaccine prevents infection by the HPV types that cause the vast majority of HPV cancers and genital warts. In fact, infections with the HPV types that cause most HPV cancers and genital warts have dropped 71% among teen girls since children first started getting the vaccine in 2006.^x

71% ↓

drop in HPV infections among teen girls since 2006

It is estimated that approximately 90% of the newly diagnosed HPV-attributable cancers in the United States could be prevented by receipt of the HPV vaccine,^{xi} and there is evidence that the vaccine may help prevent oral HPV infections.^{xii} [Get more facts.](#)²

High-Risk Factors for Oropharyngeal Cancer^{vii,viii}

- Chewing tobacco
- Heavy smoking (more than a pack a day)
- Chronic inflammation
- Having a weakened immune system
- Poor oral hygiene
- Current marijuana use
- Having 16 or more lifetime vaginal or oral sex partners
- Men with two or more same-sex oral sex partners

Educate patients and parents of age-eligible children about the link between HPV and oropharyngeal cancers, and advocate for HPV vaccination as cancer prevention. With the annual number of oropharyngeal cancers on the rise, dental providers play an important role in educating their patients about ways to prevent this type of cancer. You and your colleagues should understand and encourage HPV vaccination. On the pages that follow, you will find a list of actionable steps you can take to reduce the burden of HPV cancers within your community **today**.





Actions At-A-Glance

Visit the action associated with each item below for detailed guidance.

Know your unique role	Action 1
Practice cancer prevention	Action 2
Refer patients for vaccinations	Action 3
Collaborate	Action 4
Engage your team	Action 5
Create a pro-immunization environment	Patient Education Tools

If you are reading a printed version of this guide, please see the Appendix for full links to hyperlinked words, as indicated by superscript numbers (e.g., [Get more facts²](#)).

ACTIONS DENTAL PROVIDERS CAN TAKE

■ Action 1 Know your unique role

Dental providers [play a unique role](#)³ in HPV cancer prevention. Although dental providers cannot screen for oral HPV, you can reduce the incidence by promoting HPV vaccination.

- View this [short video](#)⁴ from the National HPV Vaccination Roundtable for more information about HPV and oropharyngeal cancer.
- Read the American Dental Association (ADA) Council on Scientific Affairs' [statement](#),⁵ which urges dentists to educate themselves and their patients about the connection between HPV and oropharyngeal cancer.
- Build on your existing practices. Dental providers are already involved in secondary and tertiary prevention (e.g., nutrition and tobacco counseling). Offering primary prevention in dental offices is a logical and clinically appropriate approach.^{xiii}
- Capitalize on patient visits. Adolescent patients tend to see the dentist twice yearly, which may be more often than they see their primary care provider—this is a window of opportunity for dental professionals to provide counseling to parents about the HPV vaccine and HPV's link to oral cancer.^{xiv}
- Consider how you can take active measures suggested by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry's [policy statement](#)⁶ on HPV vaccination.

■ Action 2 Practice cancer prevention

Parents may be unaware of the link between HPV and oral cancer. [Educate parents of your pediatric patients](#)⁷ (starting around age 9 or 10) about the risks of HPV and the importance of getting the HPV vaccine by reinforcing that **the HPV vaccine is cancer prevention**.

- Post information in patient waiting rooms.
- Include a question about immunizations on the medical history form.
- Begin the discussion about the HPV vaccine while taking your patient's comprehensive health history and when performing routine oral cancer screenings. Tell your patients that oral exams include looking for possible physical symptoms (lumps and bumps).

- Emphasize that cancer prevention begins with the parent.
- Learn [tips for talking to parents about the HPV vaccine](#),⁸ and be prepared to answer their questions.
- Include HPV cancer prevention information on your [website](#)⁹ and social media pages. Suggest parents visit the [HPV Cancer Free Family](#)¹⁰ Facebook group where members of the National HPV Vaccination Roundtable can answer parents' questions, or follow the Roundtable's [Twitter page](#).¹¹



■ Action 3 Refer patients for vaccinations

Parents may be ready to get their child vaccinated after speaking with you about the HPV vaccine. Harness this opportunity by sharing information and making referrals.

- Refer patients to their primary care provider. Stress the importance of vaccination at ages 11–12 and follow up with patients on their next visit.
- If patients lack a primary care provider, share your recommendation, or encourage them to contact the local health department.
- Distribute the printed HPV vaccine “Rx pad” reminders made available by [Team Maureen](#).¹²



■ Action 4 Collaborate

Consider partnering with pediatricians and primary care providers to ensure the continuum of care. Together you can develop and share examples of clear, concise messages, such as:

- ***You have the power to protect your child against several types of cancer.***
- ***We now have a vaccine to prevent several types of cancer.***
- ***HPV causes around 70% of throat cancer.***
- ***As a parent, you have the power to help ensure your children are healthy through vaccination.***
- ***Take your child to the doctor and dentist now to prevent health problems later.***

■ Action 5 Engage your team

- Educate your entire team about the [link between HPV and oropharyngeal cancer](#),¹³ and ensure they know the difference between oral cancer and oropharyngeal cancer.¹⁴
- Share [short videos of HPV oropharyngeal cancer survivors](#)¹⁵ to convey the importance of the vaccine.
- Create a cancer prevention culture in your office by arming staff with the [right language](#)¹⁶ to speak professionally and confidently about the vaccine, and establish processes to make appropriate recommendations to your patients. Let it be known that your practice believes in cancer prevention.
- Review the ADA's [Evidence-based Clinical Practice Guidelines for the Evaluation of Potentially Malignant Disorders in the Oral Cavity](#),¹⁷ which detail six clinical recommendations. The panel concluded that no available adjuncts demonstrated sufficient diagnostic test accuracy to support their routine use as triage tools during the evaluation of lesions in the oral cavity. The ADA offers [continuing education](#)¹⁸ on this topic.

Resource Citations:

- i <http://annals.org/aim/article-abstract/2657698/oral-human-papillomavirus-infection-differences-prevalence-between-sexes-concordance-genital>
- ii https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/hpv/basic_info/hpv_oropharyngeal.htm
- iii <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/10454411000110020801>
- iv <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3532331/>
- v <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/hpv/statistics/cases.htm>
- vi Ibid.
- vii <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/25134828>
- viii <http://annals.org/aim/article-abstract/2657698/oral-human-papillomavirus-infection-differences-prevalence-between-sexes-concordance-genital>
- ix <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/140/6/e20163947.full>
- x <https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/66/wr/mm6633a2.htm>
- xi Ibid.
- xii <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0068329>
- xiii http://www.aapd.org/media/Policies_Guidelines/P_HPV_Vaccinations.pdf
- xiv Ibid.



Follow the National HPV Vaccination Roundtable:

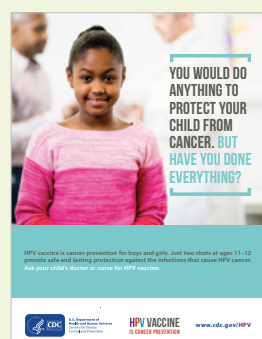
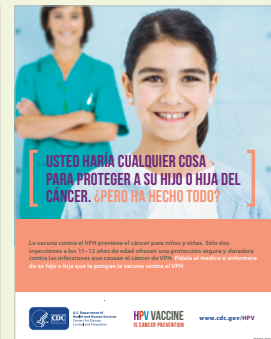
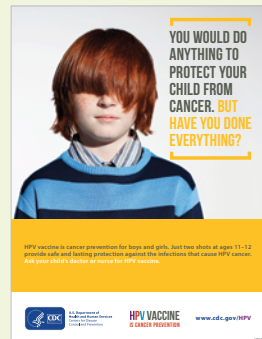


<https://twitter.com/HPVRoundtable>
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/HPVCancerFreeFamily/>

Create a pro-immunization environment by displaying posters, brochures, flyers, and handouts. Use pro-immunization messaging on your online channels including patient portals, your practice website, and social media outlets.

Materials you can use:

- Adolescent immunization schedules¹⁹
- Fact sheet: Diseases and the Vaccines that Prevent Them: HPV²⁰
- Flyers and posters: CDC’s Flyers and Posters for Preteens and Teens²¹



- Industry handout: 4 Things a Parent Needs to Know About Human Papillomavirus (HPV)²²
- Sample flyer: HPV Vaccine: Cancer Prevention for Boys and Girls²³

Spread the word to other clinicians and health care personnel to raise HPV vaccination rates and protect children from HPV cancers.

Find companion guides²⁴ tailored to physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants; nurses and medical assistants; office teams; large health systems; and small private practices in the National HPV Vaccination Roundtable’s Resource Library.²⁵