

Tips for Talking with Parents about HPV Vaccine

Situation or Concern	Try Saying...
Effective First Discussion Use “bundled” language. HPV is framed as important and no different than other adolescent vaccines.	“Your child is due for vaccinations today to protect against meningitis, HPV cancers, and pertussis. We’ll give those shots at the end of the visit.”
Ineffective First Discussion HPV is perceived as different, optional, unimportant.	 Don’t Say... “Your child is due for some shots today. There is also the HPV vaccine...”
Addressing Catch-Up Population Presumption of vaccine uptake, conveys message of importance.	“I see your child hasn’t gotten the HPV vaccine yet. We should definitely start that today!”
“Why does my child need this vaccine?”	“The HPV vaccine is very important because it prevents cancer. I want your child to be protected against cancer, so I’m recommending we start the first dose today.”
“My child will wait for marriage/won’t be exposed.”	“HPV is so common that almost everyone will be infected at some time. When your child marries, she could still catch HPV from her husband. He might have been infected before he ever met her.”
“Why now? Can this wait until my child is older?”	“HPV vaccination provides the best protection when given at age 11 or 12, which is why I recommend getting your child vaccinated as soon as possible.”

Situation or Concern

Try Saying...

"The HPV vaccine will be a green light for sexual activity."

"Studies have shown that getting the HPV vaccine has absolutely no impact on sexual behavior. It doesn't make kids more likely to have sex, or to have sex at a younger age." (Sources include Liddon NC, Am J Prev Med 2012 42:44; Bednarczyk RA, Pediatrics 2012 130:798; Jena AB JAMA Intern Med 2015)

"Would you give it to your child?"

"Yes, I gave it to my child (or grandchild, niece, friend's sons, etc.) because I think preventing cancer is very important."

"Side Effects"

"The HPV vaccine has been carefully studied by medical and scientific experts. The HPV vaccine has been shown to be very effective and very safe. Like other shots, most side effects are mild, primarily pain or redness in the arm. This should go away quickly, and the HPV vaccine has not been associated with any long-term side effects. Since 2006, over 100 million doses of the HPV vaccine have been distributed in the U.S. and over 280 million worldwide. In the years of HPV vaccine safety studies and monitoring, no serious safety concerns have been identified." (Sources include Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting Systems (VAERS); Arnheim-Dahlström, BMJ, Oct 2013; Klein NP, Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine, Oct 2012; Scheller, JAMA, 2015; Sankaranarayanan, NIH, 2016; CDC, 2017).

"Possible Effects on Fertility"

"There is no data to suggest that getting the HPV vaccine will have an effect on future fertility. However, persistent HPV infection can cause cervical cancer and the treatment of cervical cancer can leave women unable to have children. Even treatment for cervical pre-cancer can put a woman at risk for problems with her cervix during pregnancy, like causing preterm delivery."

Reminder/Recall Discussion Many parents do not know that the full vaccine series requires multiple shots. Your reminder will help them complete the series.

"I want to make sure your child receives all shots of the HPV vaccine to give the best possible protection from cancer caused by HPV. Be sure to make appointments on your way out, and put those appointments on your calendar before you leave the office today!"

If a parent has concerns about the vaccine, listen respectfully, clarify their concern, then discuss the vaccine in a nonjudgmental way, seeking to address the parent's concerns.