

# For Trans and Non-binary people, the HPV vaccine can enhance autonomous control of sexual health.

Many people are not aware that some cancers are caused by viruses. The human papillomavirus (HPV) causes 91% of cervix cancers, 75% of vagina cancers, 69% of vulva cancers, 63% of penis cancers, 91% of anus cancers, and 79% of oropharyngeal cancers (cancers of the throat).<sup>1</sup>

Transgender people are disproportionately affected by HPV-related cancers and precancerous conditions.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup>

## People of any gender can get HPV.

You can get or pass HPV through close skin-to-skin contact during sex. HPV is easily passed from one person to another during genital-oral or genital-genital contact (penis-vagina, penis-anus, vulva-vulva). A person with HPV can pass the infection to a sex partner even when they have no signs or symptoms.<sup>6</sup>

An HPV infection usually clears within two years. In some people, it persists, leading to precancerous changes that may eventually lead to cancer. HPV symptoms can develop years after having sex with someone which makes it hard to know when your exposure took place.<sup>7</sup>

## Overcoming unequal access to healthcare: The importance of the HPV vaccine

There are significant barriers to transgender and nonbinary people accessing comprehensive sexual healthcare including:

- systemic transphobia in the healthcare system;
- inadequate patient care and access;
- limited healthcare provider training/education on providing affirming and inclusive care;<sup>4</sup>
- concerns about physical and emotional safety.<sup>8</sup>

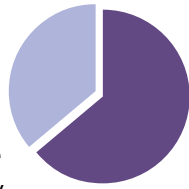
**Gender diverse people born with a cervix are 11 times more likely to receive inadequate cervical screening tests compared to cisgender female patients.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, the HPV vaccine can be an especially important and effective way for you to protect yourself against HPV-related cancers.**

Bringing a trusted friend or loved one to a screening appointment may make you feel more comfortable.<sup>7</sup> If you have a cervix, **cervical screening tests are an essential part of your sexual healthcare.**



## Have You Been Vaccinated for HPV?

The Sex Information & Education Council of Canada (SIECCAN) asked 127 transgender and non-binary people aged 25-44 if they had received the HPV vaccine. **64% of participants reported they had not received the vaccine.** Transgender and non-binary people who were not vaccinated were asked why they had not received the vaccine. Below are two of the most common responses, plus related HPV facts you can use to make an informed choice about getting vaccinated against HPV.



### “The HPV vaccine is not necessary for me”

HPV infection is a risk for any sexually active person, of any gender. Over 70% of sexually active people will get HPV in their lifetime. The HPV vaccine will protect you from most cancer-causing types of HPV. The HPV vaccine also prevents 90% of genital warts.<sup>10</sup> Transgender and non-binary individuals are at increased risk of HPV-related cancer and HPV pre-cancerous conditions.<sup>2,3,4,5</sup> Alongside safer sex practices and cancer screenings, the HPV vaccine is an effective protective measure.

### “Concern that the HPV vaccine has serious side effects”

The HPV vaccine is safe and effective.<sup>11</sup> Vaccines are approved for use in Canada when it is determined that the vaccine has met very strict standards. 15 years of safety monitoring has indicated that the HPV vaccine is very safe.<sup>12</sup> The safety and effectiveness of the HPV vaccine has been studied and reviewed by Health Canada and the National Advisory Committee on Immunization (NACI) and is recommended to Canadians.<sup>9</sup> If you are concerned about any adverse effects, it is a good idea to speak with your healthcare provider.

## Steps to reduce your risk of HPV infection and HPV-related cancer

- **HPV Vaccine:** The HPV vaccine will protect you against the most common HPV types that cause cancer and genital warts. It is effective and safe.
- **Cervical Cancer Screenings:** Regular cervical cancer screenings (Pap test, HPV test) detect abnormal cells in the cervix or the presence of HPV. Speak to your Healthcare Provider to ensure that you are up to date with your cervical screenings. Recommended cervical cancer screening guidelines vary by province and territory. Cervical cancer **self-screening** can be an effective way to screen because it allows you more control of the medical procedure. This can help reduce gender dysphoria and improve a sense of bodily autonomy.<sup>8</sup> Options vary by province/territory, talk to your healthcare provider about self-screening if you are interested.
- **Anal Screening:** If you have receptive anal sex, speak to your healthcare provider about potential screening options.<sup>13</sup>
- **Condoms and Dental Dams:** Since HPV is spread through skin-to-skin contact, correct and consistent condom and/or dental dam use may reduce but will not eliminate the risk of HPV.

## To get the HPV vaccine:

1. Speak to a Healthcare Provider.
2. Get a prescription from a physician or nurse practitioner. In some provinces, pharmacists can also provide a prescription.
3. Pick up your vaccine and get vaccinated. In all provinces, primary care providers, physicians, nurse practitioners, and pharmacists can administer the vaccine. The territories differ in allowing pharmacists to administer the vaccine.<sup>14</sup>
4. Submit your private insurance claim if applicable. Many private health insurance plans reimburse some or all of the cost of the vaccine.

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8 Canadian Cancer Society. n.d. <https://cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/find-cancer-early/screening-in-lgbtq-communities/trans-man-or-nonbinary-person-assigned-female-at-birth-do-i-need-cervical-cancer-screening#:~:text=HPV%20is%20spread%20through%20sexual,your%20healthcare%20provider%20>

9 Connolly, D., Hughes, X., Berner, A. 2020. Barriers and facilitators to cervical cancer screening among transgender men and non-binary people with a cervix: A systemic narrative review. *Preventive Medicine*. /j.jy.pmed.2020.106071

10 Canadian Cancer Society. n.d. <https://cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/reduce-your-risk/get-vaccinated/human-papillomavirus-hpv>

11 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. 2021. <https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/parents/vaccinesafety.html>

12 Immunize BC. 2024. <https://immunizebc.ca/vaccines/hpv#:~:text=The%20HPV%20vaccine%20is%20safe,it%20was%20safe%20and%20effective.>

13 CATIE. 2023. <https://www.catie.ca/what-you-need-to-know-about-human-papillomavirus-hpv-and-anal-cancer>

14 Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. 2022. <https://www.partnershipagainstcancer.ca/topics/hpv-vaccine-access-2022/>