

# HPV AT THE DENTIST

## Parent Talking Tips

**Start the Conversation:** "Is your child up to date on the HPV vaccine? It prevents 6 types of cancer, including oropharyngeal cancer. Make sure to ask your child's doctor at your next visit."

### Parents May Ask

### Your Answer

Why does my child need the HPV vaccine?

HPV is extremely common - **most people will have HPV during their life.** By vaccinating your child, you can protect them from several types of cancer.

Can't we wait until they are older?

**The best time to get the HPV vaccine is between ages 9 and 12.** This is because children have a stronger immune response. After age 14, they will need an extra catch-up shot to be fully protected.

Does the vaccine really work?

**Yes,** studies continue to prove the HPV vaccine works extremely well. We have seen a significant decrease in the number of infections and cervical precancer in young people since the vaccine was introduced in 2006.

I thought the HPV vaccine was only for girls?

**The vaccine was first recommended for girls, but is now recommended for all children.** The vaccine prevents both cervical and oropharyngeal (throat/back of tongue) cancer. In fact, oropharyngeal cancer is now more common than cervical cancer, and is more likely to impact men.

How much does the vaccine cost?

Like other childhood vaccines in Massachusetts, the HPV vaccine is free. Talk to your doctor or call your health insurance to find a provider.

I'm worried about the safety of the vaccine. Do you think it is safe?

**Yes,** the HPV vaccination is very safe. Like any other shot, the most common side effect is soreness at the injection site. Over 120 million doses of the HPV vaccine have been given and no serious safety concerns have been found. **Talk to your doctor if you still have questions.**

# HPV AT THE DENTIST

## Age 18-26 Talking Tips

**Start the Conversation:** "Have you gotten the HPV vaccine? It prevents 6 types of cancer, including oropharyngeal cancer. Ask your doctor about the vaccine at your next visit."

### Parents May Ask

### Your Answer

What is Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)?

HPV is an extremely common virus that spreads through sexual and intimate contact. **Most of us will have HPV at some point in our lives.** HPV can cause genital warts and 6 types of cancer, including oropharyngeal cancer.

Am I too old for the HPV vaccine?

It is most effective when given between the ages 9–12 but **the vaccine is recommended for everyone up to age 26.**

Can I still get the vaccine if I already have HPV?

**Yes.** The vaccine can protect you from other types in the future.

Can I still get HPV if I am vaccinated?

**Unfortunately, yes.** There are over 100 different strains, or types, of HPV. The vaccine protects you from 9 strains that are responsible for about 90% of genital warts and HPV-related cancers.

Is there a way to test for oral HPV?

**Not yet.** Researchers are working on developing a test, but so far they are unreliable.

I'm worried about the safety of the vaccine. Do you think it is safe?

**Yes, the HPV vaccination is very safe.** Soreness at the injection site is common, but over 120 million doses of the HPV vaccine have been given and no serious safety concerns have been found. **Talk to your doctor if you still have questions.**

# HPV AT THE DENTIST

## Age 27+ Talking Tips

**Start the Conversation:** "Did you get the HPV vaccine as a child or young adult? It prevents 6 types of cancer including oropharyngeal cancer."

### Parents May Ask

### Your Answer

Am I too old for the HPV vaccine?

**Talk to your doctor to see if you would benefit from getting vaccinated.** The vaccine is approved up to age 45, but it is not usually recommended after age 26 because most adults have already been exposed to HPV by this time.

What is oropharyngeal cancer?

**The oropharynx is the area at the back of your throat.** It includes your tonsils, the base of your tongue and the back of the roof of your mouth. **Cancer in this area is usually caused by HPV.**

How common is HPV-related oropharyngeal cancer?

**HPV causes almost 20,000 cases of oropharyngeal cancer every year and the number of cases is increasing each year.** Oropharyngeal cancer is now the most common HPV-related cancer.

What are the symptoms of oropharyngeal cancer?

Symptoms include hoarseness, pain or difficulty swallowing, pain while chewing, a lump in the neck, a feeling of a persistent lump in the throat, change in voice, or non-healing sores on the neck.

Who is at risk of HPV-related oropharyngeal cancer?

**Anyone can get oropharyngeal cancer, but it is more common in men than women.** It is usually transmitted through oral sex. Having multiple sex partners can increase your risk. Smoking and drinking may also increase your risk of oropharyngeal cancer.

How serious is HPV-related oropharyngeal cancer?

Oropharyngeal cancer is usually treated with a combination of chemotherapy, radiation, and surgery. **The 5-year survival rate is 85-90%.** This is much higher than oropharyngeal cancers that aren't caused by HPV.