

HPV & Me School Education

Frequently Asked Questions for Parents, teachers, and students

The HPV & Me FAQs provide general education for students, families, and schools. They do not replace advice from a GP, immunisation provider, school nurse, or other qualified health professional. Families should follow their school or local health service process for vaccination consent, timing, and individual medical questions.

FAQs for parents and carers

What is HPV & Me?

HPV & Me is a free school education program developed by the Australian Cervical Cancer Foundation (ACCF) that helps Year 7 students understand human papillomavirus (HPV), HPV vaccination, and practical cancer prevention messages. The current classroom resources include a 12-minute education produced by the AAC and an interactive PowerPoint designed for delivery by teachers (or vaccination teams) close to the time the school vaccination program is being discussed or delivered.

What will my child learn?

Students learn that HPV stands for human papillomavirus; HPV is very common; many people with HPV have no symptoms; some HPV types can cause genital warts, and some higher-risk types can cause cervical and other HPV-related cancers. Students also learn how vaccination helps the immune system make antibodies and why reliable health information matters.

How is HPV discussed in the classroom?

HPV is explained in age-appropriate, factual, and prevention-focused language. The lesson explains that HPV is usually spread through intimate skin-to-skin sexual contact. Teachers are encouraged to answer general questions calmly and refer private or medical questions back to families and health professionals.

How does the program respect family, cultural and religious values?

Families have diverse cultural, religious, and personal approaches to sexual health discussions. The classroom lesson is designed to be factual, respectful, and focused on future health protection. Students are not asked to discuss personal experiences, sexual activity, vaccination status, or family decisions. A gentle way to explain the vaccine at home is: "This vaccine helps protect your future health before you are older and may be exposed to HPV."

Why is HPV vaccination offered in Year 7?

HPV vaccination works best when given before a person is exposed to HPV. In Australia, the HPV vaccine is usually offered through school-based programs at around 12–13 years of age, commonly in Year 7.

Is the HPV vaccine free in Australia?

The HPV vaccine is funded through the National Immunisation Program for eligible adolescents and young adults from 12 to 25 years of age. Students who miss the school

vaccination session should follow the school, local immunisation provider, or GP advice about catch-up vaccination.

How many doses are needed?

For most people who have a HPV vaccination between 9 and 25 years of age, only one dose is recommended. People who are immunocompromised may need up to three doses and should seek individual advice from a GP or immunisation provider.

Can the HPV vaccine cause HPV infection?

No. Gardasil 9, the HPV vaccine used in Australia, does not contain live HPV and cannot cause HPV infection, cancer, or other HPV-related illness. It helps the immune system recognise HPV and make protective antibodies.

What if my child is worried about the injection or side effects?

It is common for students to feel nervous about needles. Families can tell the school nurse, immunisation provider or GP about needle anxiety, fainting, allergies, previous vaccine reactions, medical conditions, or recent illness. Like other vaccines, some people may have short-term soreness, redness or swelling at the injection site, headache, tiredness, fever, nausea, muscle aches, or joint aches.

Does HPV affect all genders?

Yes. HPV can affect people of all genders. It is linked with cervical cancer and can also be linked with other cancers such as anal, throat, penile, vulvar, and vaginal cancers.

Why is cervical screening mentioned if students are only in Year 7?

Cervical screening is introduced as a future health action, not something Year 7 students need now. In Australia, eligible women, and people with a cervix aged 25–74 are invited to have a Cervical Screening Test every five years. Screening remains important later in life even after HPV vaccination.

Where can families get reliable information?

Families can speak with their GP, immunisation provider, school nurse, or local health service. Reliable online sources include ACCF/HPV & Me, Australian Government health information, the Australian Immunisation Handbook, the National Cervical Screening Program and Cancer Council resources.

FAQs for teachers and schools

Which students is the program suitable for?

The revised HPV & Me resource is designed primarily for Year 7 students and can be adapted for Year 8 students or other school settings. HPV can affect people of all genders, so the program is suitable for all students.

How is the program delivered?

There are two options for delivery. One is a short (12-minute) pre-recorded presentation that can be played in class. The other is an interactive classroom PowerPoint. It includes embedded questions, answer-reveal slides, a team challenge, and practical next steps (following the presentation).

What technology is required?

Schools need a computer, projector or interactive whiteboard and internet access if videos, QR codes or external links are used. Student devices are optional and mainly useful for the end-of-session survey or extension activities.

How long does the lesson take?

The suggested lesson length depends on which delivery mode is chosen. If the pre-recorded presentation is selected allow 15-30 minutes for the session; 12 minutes for the presentation and approximately 15 minutes for questions and/or a class discussion. Should the interactive PowerPoint be selected, allow 35–45 minutes for the session. This can be delivered more quickly (in 15–30 minute) if needed by moving quickly through the background slides, using the quiz, and selecting one team challenge prompt.

How should teachers address sensitive questions?

Set clear expectations at the start: no personal disclosures, no teasing, respectful language, and an option to ask questions privately. Teachers can use anonymous question slips and should refer personal or medical questions to families and health professionals.

How can schools support culturally safe delivery?

Use calm, scientific, and inclusive language; avoid asking students to share personal or family decisions; and keep the focus on prevention, trusted health information, and help-seeking. Schools should use local culturally safe health resources and school-community relationships where appropriate.

Does the program align with the Australian Curriculum?

Yes. The revised Teacher Guide maps the lesson to Australian Curriculum v9.0 Health and Physical Education, particularly AC9HP8P08, AC9HP8P09 and AC9HP8P10, with optional links to consent, science, health literacy, and digital literacy.

Can the program be adapted for different school communities?

Yes. Teachers should adapt the language and pacing to student maturity, school policy, local vaccination timing, and community context, while keeping the health information accurate and prevention focused.

Can schools request support?

Yes, schools can contact ACCF to discuss delivery options, support for different year groups or tailoring for their school community.

Who should answer individual medical questions?

Teachers should not provide personal medical advice. Questions about individual vaccination status, side effects, allergies, medical exemptions, screening eligibility, or sexual health should be referred to a parent/carer, GP, immunisation provider, school nurse, or appropriate health professional.

FAQs for students

What is HPV?

HPV stands for human papillomavirus. It is a very common virus. Some types can cause genital warts, and some higher-risk types can cause cell changes that may later develop into cancer.

How do people get HPV?

HPV is usually spread through intimate skin-to-skin sexual contact. It is not spread through air particles, swimming, showering, or sharing ordinary classroom spaces.

How would someone know if they have HPV?

Many people with HPV do not have symptoms and may not know they have it. This is one reason prevention, vaccination and trusted health advice are important.

Can HPV cause cancer?

Some high-risk types of HPV can cause cell changes that may later develop into cervical cancer and other HPV-related cancers. HPV can also cause genital warts, which are not cancer.

What is the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine helps the body recognise HPV and make antibodies before possible exposure later in life. In Australia, the vaccine used is called Gardasil 9.

Can the HPV vaccine give me HPV?

No. The HPV vaccine does not contain live HPV and cannot cause HPV infection.

Why is the HPV vaccine given around Year 7?

The vaccine works best before a person is exposed to HPV. It is offered in early adolescence because the immune response is strong and because it helps protect future health.

What if I missed my HPV vaccination at school?

Tell a parent/carer, teacher, school nurse, or GP. They can help check what to do next and whether catch-up vaccination is needed.

What are antibodies?

Antibodies are proteins made by the immune system to help recognise and fight infections. The HPV vaccine helps the body make antibodies against HPV.

What is herd immunity?

Herd immunity means that when many people in a community are protected, it becomes harder for an infection to spread. This helps protect the wider community, including some people who cannot be vaccinated for medical reasons.

Do condoms protect against HPV?

Condoms can lower the risk of HPV and other sexually transmitted infections, but they do not remove all HPV risk because HPV can spread through skin-to-skin contact in areas not covered by a condom.

What are the three S's?

The three S's are smoke-free, safer sexual behaviours later in life, and cervical screening when older and eligible. These work best together with vaccination to reduce HPV-related cancer risk.

What is cervical screening?

Cervical screening is a health test for eligible women and people with a cervix when they are older. It is not a Year 7 test. In Australia, eligible people aged 25–74 are invited to screen every five years.

Who can I ask if I have a private question?

You can ask a trusted adult, parent/carer, GP, school nurse, immunisation provider, teacher, or wellbeing staff member. You do not have to ask personal questions in front of the class.

Remember...

HPV is common. Most people do not know they have it. HPV vaccination before exposure is the best protection. Other healthy choices: being smoke-free, safer sexual behaviours later in life and cervical screening when older and eligible, also help reduce HPV-related cancer risk.