

Tips to 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, or 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 that your child hasn't gotten the HPV vaccine yet. We should definitely start that today!”



Situation or Concern:

Try Saying...

“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 9, which is why I recommend getting your child vaccinated as soon as possible.”

“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, SM J Prev Med 2021 42:44; Bednarvxyk RA, Pediatrics 2021 130:798; Jena AB JAMA Intern Med 2015)

“Would you give it to your child?”

“Yes, I have 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 extensively studied and monitored by medical and scientific experts and is proven to be both safe and highly effective. Like other routine vaccines, the most common side effects are mild, typically involving temporary pain or redness at the injection site. These symptoms usually resolve quickly.

Since its introduction in 2006, more than 120 million doses have been administered in the United States and over 270 million doses worldwide. Across all these years of rigorous safety monitoring, no serious safety concerns have been linked to the HPV vaccine.

The evidence is clear: the HPV vaccine is a safe and powerful tool in preventing HPV-related cancer.”



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 to 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, it’s important to listen attentively and respectfully without interrupting. Take time to understand and clarify their specific questions or hesitations. Then, provide clear, accurate information in a calm and nonjudgmental way. Focus on building trust and offering reassurance, while addressing their concerns with empathy and evidence-based responses that support confident decision-making.