

## FAQs on Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and HPV Vaccination

### What is Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus that can infect both men and women. HPV is transmitted through skin-to-skin contact such as close genital contact during sexual activity.

### What are the risks of HPV infection?

HPV infections usually do not cause symptoms.

There are more than 200 different strains of HPV, grouped into high-risk strains that may cause cancer and low-risk strains that do not cause cancer.

High-risk strains are associated with cervical cancer and other cancers such as vaginal, vulvar, oral, anal, and penile cancer.

Other low-risk strains may lead to genital, oral, or other skin warts.

In most cases, the infection can be cleared by the body's immune system. However, sometimes the infection can persist and cause abnormal changes to the cells, which may develop into cancer. This may take years to develop but is one of the most significant outcomes of being infected with HPV.

### How prevalent is HPV infection in Singapore? How can I protect myself from HPV infection?

It is estimated that eight out of 10 people will get HPV infection at some point in their lifetime. [\[Source: SCS\]](#)

The best way to reduce the risk of HPV infection is through vaccination.

### What are the HPV vaccines approved for use in Singapore?

The HPV vaccines approved for use in Singapore are Cervarix and Gardasil 9.

The HPV vaccination offers protection against specific types of HPV infection that may lead to cervical cancer.

Cervarix provides protection against 70% of all cervical cancers.

Gardasil 9 provides protection against 90% of cervical cancers. It also provides protection against non-cancer-causing strains of HPV infection (e.g. genital warts).

### Which HPV vaccine does UHC provide?

UHC offers the Gardasil 9 vaccine. **It is a course of 3 doses to be completed over a period of 6 months.** The recommended schedule is 0, 2 and 6 months, i.e. an interval of 2 months between the first and second doses, and an interval of 4 months between the second and third doses.

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### **Who should be vaccinated?**

Any individual aged 9 to 45 who wishes to reduce the risk of HPV infection and the associated complications.

Gardasil 9 is licensed for use in both males and females.

The vaccine is most effective if given before the first sexual exposure. It is still beneficial for individuals who are sexually active, as they may not have been exposed to the HPV strains covered by the vaccine.

### **Who should NOT be vaccinated?**

The HPV vaccination may not be suitable for you if:

- you are pregnant.
- you are sensitive or allergic to any of the vaccine components.
- you have an acute infectious illness (please wait until you have recovered from the illness).

Always consult a doctor if you are unsure about your vaccination eligibility.

### **Do I still need to undergo regular cervical screening after vaccination?**

As with any vaccination, the HPV vaccination does not provide 100% protection. Cervical cancer can be caused by other HPV subtypes which the vaccine does not protect against.

The HPV vaccination is not a substitute for routine cervical cancer screening. Women who have received vaccination should continue regular cervical screening according to the local guidelines.

### **Are booster doses required after an individual has completed three doses?**

There is currently no recommendation for additional doses or booster shots.

### **Are the vaccines safe and effective?**

Clinical trials and post-marketing surveillance have shown that HPV vaccines are safe and effective in preventing infections with selected HPV subtypes.

### **Are there any HPV vaccine side effects?**

Possible side effects are local reactions such as pain, swelling, redness at the injection sites, and fever.

### **How can I relieve the discomfort of these common side effects?**

For relief of fever and possible pain from the vaccination, a mild painkiller medication (e.g. paracetamol) which you are not allergic to, may relieve your discomfort. You may apply a cold compress over the injection site to help reduce any pain, redness, and/or swelling.

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### **I am pregnant/breastfeeding. Should I be vaccinated?**

HPV vaccination is not recommended for pregnant women. If a woman is found to be pregnant during the HPV vaccination, it is recommended that the remaining dose(s) be postponed until after delivery.

If the HPV vaccine has been administered during pregnancy, please consult your doctor for further advice.

Available data is not sufficient to assess the effects of HPV vaccination on the breastfed infant. You may wish to discuss this with your doctor.

### **What should I tell my doctor before my vaccination?**

You should inform your doctor if you:

- are pregnant.
- have a fever or an infection (please consider rescheduling your vaccination).
- are allergic to any medicines, vaccines, or food.
- have recently received any vaccinations.
- have other illnesses or are on medication.

### **I intend to take or have taken my flu vaccination recently, can I still take my HPV vaccination now?**

HPV vaccination can be administered after or concurrently with the flu vaccine. Vaccines should be given in different sites, if administered together.

### **If I have recovered from an infection (e.g. flu, COVID-19, etc.), can I still take my HPV vaccination?**

It is recommended to wait for two weeks after recovery from an infection (e.g. flu, COVID-19, etc.) to receive the HPV vaccination.

### **If I have completed the Cervarix vaccination / am in the midst of the Cervarix vaccination schedule, may I take / continue with the Gardasil 9 vaccination?**

Please discuss this with your doctor.