

TALKING TO PARENTS OF YOUNG MALES ABOUT HPV

Talking to parents of young males about the importance of the HPV vaccine requires sensitivity, clear communication, and an understanding of the concerns parents may have. Here are some specific recommendations for clinicians.

1. Start Early and Frame the Discussion Positively¹

Timing: Initiate the conversation when the child is 9–12 years old, as the vaccine is most effective before exposure to HPV through sexual activity.

Emphasize Prevention: Frame the vaccine as a way to protect their son from several types of cancer, including throat, penile, and anal cancers, as well as from genital warts, and highlight its effectiveness.

Normalize the Vaccine: Stress that the HPV vaccine is a routine part of adolescent vaccinations, similar to Tdap or meningococcal vaccines.

2. Address Gender-Specific Benefits²

Explain that boys are also at risk of HPV-related cancers and genital warts.[#]

Mention that vaccination also contributes to reducing the spread of HPV, benefiting public health.

Highlight how vaccinating boys helps protect their future partners.

3. Use Evidence-Based Messaging⁴

Share facts about the safety and efficacy of the vaccine, such as:

- ▶ “The HPV vaccine is over 90% effective at preventing infections that can lead to cancer.”
- ▶ “Over 15 years of research supports its safety, with more than 100 million doses administered in the U.S.”

Reference endorsements from trusted medical organizations like the CDC, WHO, Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine and American Academy of Pediatrics.

4. Address Misconceptions and Concerns⁵

Reassure: Acknowledge parents’ concerns and provide reassuring, evidence-based answers:

Safety concerns: “The HPV vaccine has been rigorously tested and monitored for safety. Most side effects are mild, like soreness at the injection site.”

Promiscuity myth: “Studies show that getting the vaccine does not lead to earlier or riskier sexual activity.”

Correct misinformation: about HPV being only a “female issue.”

5. Personalize the Message

Use relatable language: “As a parent, I understand wanting to do everything to protect your child’s health. This vaccine is one of the most important steps.”

Provide real-life examples: Share stories of patients or families impacted by HPV-related cancers.

6. Provide Clear Action Steps

Offer a straightforward recommendation: “I strongly recommend the HPV vaccine for your son today. It’s safe, effective, and protects against cancer.”

Ensure parents know the vaccination schedule: typically a two-dose series if started before age 15.

7. Leverage Educational Materials

Provide brochures, infographics, or links to credible websites, such as:

- ▶ CDC’s HPV vaccine information: [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/vaccines/reasons-to-get.html)
- ▶ American Cancer Society: [cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org)
- ▶ American Sexual Health Association

8. Be Patient and Follow Up

Respect parents’ need for time to make decisions. Offer to revisit the conversation at the next visit if they’re hesitant.

Encourage questions and provide follow-up resources for additional information.

References

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