

# Leading Cancer Research Centers Call for Urgent Action to Get HPV Vaccination Back on Track

Cancers caused by human papillomavirus (HPV) are a significant public health problem in the United States (U.S.). But these cancers are preventable with HPV vaccination. The 71 National Cancer Institute (NCI)-designated cancer centers fully endorse the goal of eliminating cancers caused by HPV through gender-neutral HPV vaccination and evidence-based cancer screening. The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly interrupted delivery of key preventive services, resulting in many U.S. adolescents missing routine HPV vaccine doses. Even before the pandemic, HPV vaccination uptake in the U.S. lagged far behind several high-income countries and remains well below the Healthy People 2030 goal of vaccinating 80% of boys and girls aged 13-15. **To protect adolescents from cancers caused by HPV, it is urgent to act now to get HPV vaccination back on track.**

NCI-designated cancer centers and other leading cancer organizations and research institutes strongly encourage parents to vaccinate their adolescents as soon as possible. The COVID-19 vaccination for children age 12 and older presents an opportunity for parents to protect their children by catching up on missed or due routinely recommended vaccines. The U.S. has recommended routine HPV vaccination for females since 2006 and for males since 2011. Current recommendations are for routine vaccination at ages 11 or 12 or starting at age 9. Catch-up HPV vaccination is recommended through age 26. The guidelines recommend that adults ages 27 to 45 talk with a health care provider because some people who have not been vaccinated might benefit. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 54% of boys and girls ages 13-17 completed the HPV vaccination series in 2019, compared to 42% in 2015, with variability by geographic region. The COVID-19 pandemic has jeopardized these modest but positive gains. In spite of more than 15 years of safety and monitoring data and strong evidence showing reduction of HPV vaccine-type infection and cancers, HPV vaccination uptake still isn't meeting our national goal.

The U.S. is facing a significant vaccination gap, especially for adolescents, due to the pandemic. Well-child visits are down. Early in the pandemic, HPV vaccination rates among adolescents fell by 75%, resulting in large numbers of unvaccinated children. As of August 2021, the deficit for HPV vaccination is more than 18% below previous years. During the current "back-to-school" period and National Immunization Awareness Month, it is an ideal time to schedule a well-child visit and catch up on recommended vaccinations. **It is crucial that the nation gets back on track with adolescent vaccination to ensure protected children and safer communities.**

The CDC's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has endorsed the safety and effectiveness of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine and its use in adolescents age 12 and older. Since May 2021, the CDC has recommended COVID-19 vaccination for this population. In addition, COVID-19 vaccines and recommended vaccines may be administered at the same visit. Protecting your child from COVID-19 by getting them vaccinated is an easy opportunity to catch up on other recommended vaccines like the HPV vaccine.

HPV vaccination is cancer prevention. Now is the time to catch up on missed doses of HPV vaccine to prevent future cancers. Contact your local health department or health care provider to schedule an appointment for missed vaccinations today.

More information on HPV is available from the CDC and **National HPV Vaccination Roundtable.**

