

For a **limited time**, NSW Health is making human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine (Gardasil®) available to all men who have sex with men (MSM) aged 20-34 years through sexual health clinics and some GPs. The 3-dose vaccination course must start **before the end of 2018**.

Questions & Answers

Q. What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a common virus affecting both men and women. HPV is spread through genital contact during sex with someone who has the virus. The virus passes through tiny breaks in the skin. It is not spread through blood or other body fluids. Condoms offer limited protection, as they do not cover all of the genital skin.

Most sexually active people will have a genital HPV infection at some time in their lives. Most people have no symptoms and their body usually clears the infection on its own.

There are about 40 different types of HPV that affect the genital area. Some types of HPV can cause cancer, and other types cause genital warts. The types that can lead to cancer are known as high risk types.

In men, cancers that are often associated with HPV are cancer of the anus, penis, tongue, throat and tonsils. These cancers are rare, but are increasing in Australia and other countries.

Q. Are men who have sex with men (MSM) at increased risk from HPV disease?

Yes. MSM are at increased risk of HPV infection. Men who have receptive anal intercourse (bottoms) are at the highest risk and are about 50 times more likely to develop anal cancer than other men. MSM are 3-5 times more likely than heterosexual men to develop genital/anal warts. People who are HIV positive are at even higher risk of anal cancer.

There is also evidence that MSM experience new HPV infections up to at least 35 years of age. People, especially men, who have cleared HPV from their body can still be at risk of getting the same HPV type again.

Q. Which vaccine will be offered & how effective is it?

NSW Health is offering free Gardasil® vaccine to MSM up to 34 years of age in 2018.

Gardasil® is highly effective in preventing HPV types 6, 11, 16 and 18. HPV types 16 and 18 cause up to 90% of HPV-related cancers in men. HPV types 6 and 11 cause almost all genital warts and do not cause cancer.

Vaccination will not get rid of HPV if you already have it or prevent cancer developing if you are infected with a high risk type. But it does protect against re-infection with the types in the vaccine.

Most HPV-related anal cancers are caused by HPV type 16 (up to 90%) and type 18. Gardasil® protects against both these types making it very effective in preventing anal cancers.

Q. Hasn't a new HPV vaccine been introduced?

Yes. A new HPV vaccine (GARDASIL 9) has been introduced that protects against 9 types of HPV. This vaccine is being funded by the Australian Government from 2018 for young people under 20 years of age, mainly in high schools.

GARDASIL 9 prevents against infection with an additional five high-risk HPV types, so will prevent a greater number of cancers than Gardasil®.

GARDASIL 9 can be purchased via a doctor's prescription from a community pharmacy. Talk to your nurse or doctor if you are HIV positive or would like to consider the additional benefit of the 9-valent vaccine.

Q. How many doses of vaccine do I need to be protected?

Gardasil® is given in a **3-dose schedule at 0, 2 and 6 months** for people aged 15 years and over. You should leave at least 2 months between the first and second dose, and at least 6 months between the first and the third doses, however longer intervals are also fine (but leave you unprotected for longer).

Q. Haven't I already been given Gardasil®?

Some men aged 20-21 years in 2018 and 2019 may already have received Gardasil® as part of the School Vaccination Program for male students in Year 9 in 2013 and 2014.

If you are unsure if you have been given the vaccine, you can find out your vaccination status by contacting the National HPV Register on 1800 478 734.

Q. Will my information be shared?

Yes. If you give your consent, information about your HPV vaccination will be sent to the National HPV Register to keep a record of your vaccination history and for evaluation purposes. You can contact the National HPV Register on 1800 478 734. You can still get HPV vaccine if you don't want your information to be sent to the register.

Q. Where can I find more information about HPV?

You can find more information about HPV, and HPV vaccination at www.hpvvaccine.org.au

Q. Where can I get free Gardasil®?

MSM aged 20-34 years who have not previously been vaccinated can access vaccine from sexual health clinics across NSW. Phone the Sexual Health Infolink on **1800 451 624** to find out where else you can get free HPV vaccine.

Please read the information carefully. If you have any questions, please speak to your sexual health or EPIC nurse or doctor.