Girl Scout HPV Vaccine Education Toolkit:

A Girl Scout-led Approach for Promoting the HPV Vaccine Starting at Age 9

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Learn more about the program: Emerging Leaders Program - National HPV Vaccination Roundtable

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Introduction

This toolkit is designed to help Girl Scouts in grades 9–12 learn about human papillomavirus (HPV)-related cancers and how HPV vaccination can help prevent them, while building leadership and communication skills to share cancer prevention information with their families and communities. It uses evidence-based messaging informed by the ACS National HPV Vaccination Roundtable, including the recommendation to begin HPV vaccination at age 9.

Significance

What we know about HPV and vaccinating against it

- **HPV causes multiple cancers**, including cervical, oropharyngeal, anal, and other anogenital cancers.[1]
- **HPV vaccination is a safe and effective cancer prevention strategy**, particularly when administered prior to exposure.[2]
- **HPV vaccination can begin at age 9**.[2]
    - Earlier initiation improves series completion and reframes HPV vaccination as routine cancer prevention rather than a delayed or stigmatized decision.[3]

Why peer, family, and community contexts matter

- **Peer influence:** Peer-based education is effective in improving health behaviors and shows promise in enhancing HPV vaccine knowledge, confidence, and uptake.[4,5]
- **Family influence:** Families play a central role in HPV vaccination decisions, which develop through ongoing conversations over time and require clear, accessible concepts to support communication.[6]
- **Community influence:** Trusted, non-medical community settings help normalize vaccination, reinforce accurate information, and reduce hesitancy through repeated, relatable exposure.[5,7]

Why Girl Scouts

Girl Scouts offer a scalable, trusted platform to deliver HPV education and promote cancer prevention across diverse populations.

- **2.5 million strong – national infrastructure for scalable outreach**[8]
- **1 in 3 women are alumni**[8]
- **Proven history in health, leadership, and STEM education**[9]

Troop Leader Guide

Using This Toolkit in Girl Scout Programming

The following activities are examples of how this toolkit can be incorporated into Girl Scouts programming to support badge work, leadership development, and health education. Instructions for all badge steps are available free of charge in your Girl Scout Volunteer Toolkit.

Senior and Ambassador Women's Health Badge (Grades 9-12)

Supports Girl Scouts in exploring cancer prevention, understanding HPV-related health information, and building knowledge about behaviors that promote long-term wellness. Encourages connections between women's health, prevention, and informed decision-making.

Senior STEM Career Exploration (Grades 9-10)

Engages Girl Scouts in investigating HPV-related cancers, evaluating health information, and exploring how science and education contribute to disease prevention and improved community health outcomes.

Ambassador STEM Career Exploration (Grades 11-12)

Aligns with the Health & Wellness field by positioning Girl Scouts as emerging public health professionals. Participants investigate HPV as a real-world health issue, evaluate evidence-based information, and explore prevention strategies while developing and sharing health messaging.

Senior Digital Leadership (Grades 9-10)

Builds digital leadership skills by helping Girl Scouts analyze how health information is shared online. Participants identify misinformation, evaluate HPV-related content, and use digital platforms to communicate accurate, evidence-based messages that positively influence others.

Ambassador Public Policy (Grades 11-12)

Encourages Girl Scouts to examine how public health issues are shaped by policy, advocacy, and education. Participants explore HPV and cancer prevention as real-world examples and consider how individuals and communities can promote improved health communication and prevention efforts.

Senior and Ambassador Gold Touch Award (Grades 9-12)

The Gold Torch Award aligns with HPV education by emphasizing leadership through guiding peers in real-world settings. This supports peer-to-peer health communication, myth correction, and youth-led cancer prevention efforts while strengthening leadership, communication, and advocacy skills.

1. Send letter to parents.

Share the parent letter prior to starting the program to inform families and set expectations.

2. See lesson plan: Prevention Is Key With HPV to guide instruction.

This lesson plan has been adapted with permission from Cancer Pathways and is aligned with The Cancer Happens® curriculum. It includes structured guidance across subject areas and is aligned with the National Health Education Standards and CASEL Social and Emotional Learning competencies.

3. Introduce HPV slides.

Present the HPV slides to provide foundational knowledge about HPV and learn about HPV cancer prevention, and vaccination.

4. Engage with recommended learning activities.

Use the activities to reinforce key concepts and encourage discussion and peer engagement.

5. Complete recommended activities.

Have participants apply what they've learned through a hands-on or group-based activity.

6. Order badges.

Once requirements are completed, order the appropriate Girl Scout badges.

Please refer to the appendices for extra resources, materials, and support tools.

Letter to Parents

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

Your Girl Scout troop will be participating in an educational program focused on human papillomavirus (HPV), cancer prevention, and sharing important health information.

This program will be guided from a toolkit provided by the American Cancer Society National HPV Vaccination Roundtable. It introduces girls to HPV, how it is linked to certain cancers, and how prevention strategies – including vaccination starting at age 9 – can reduce cancer risk. Through engaging, age-appropriate activities, Girl Scouts will build knowledge, confidence, and leadership skills.

Girls will have the opportunity to:

- Learn about HPV and its connection to cancer.
- Understand how the HPV vaccine helps prevent cancer.
- Practice sharing accurate health information with others.

Given the sensitive nature of HPV, all content is presented in a respectful, age-appropriate, and cancer prevention–focused manner. Activities are group-based, focused on general health and wellness, and designed to encourage open, guided discussion. No sensitive or private topics will be discussed. No medical advice will be provided, and no personal information will be collected.

Participation is completely voluntary. Girls are encouraged to engage at their own comfort level, and parents are always welcome to observe.

By participating, your Girl Scout may build confidence, strengthen communication skills, and contribute to cancer prevention awareness in their community.

Parent/Guardian Acknowledgment
I acknowledge that I have received this information and give permission for my child to participate in these troop activities.

Girl Scout's Name: _____

Parent/Guardian Name (Print): _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

Lesson Plan: Prevention Is Key With HPV

Adapted with permission from The Cancer Happens® curriculum: Lesson 5
Topic: Cancer Risk-Reduction | Grade Level: 9-12

Standard 1: Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.

- 1.12.1 Predict how healthy behaviors can affect health status.
- 1.12.5 Propose ways to reduce or prevent injuries and health problems.
- 1.12.8 Analyze personal susceptibility to injury, illness, or death if engaging in unhealthy behaviors.
- 1.12.9 Analyze the potential severity of injury or illness if engaging in unhealthy behaviors.

Standard 4: Students will demonstrate the ability to use interpersonal communication skills to enhance health and avoid or reduce health risks.

- 4.12.1 Use skills for communicating effectively with family, peers, and others to enhance health.

Standard 5: Students will demonstrate the ability to use decision-making skills to enhance health.

- 5.8.4 Distinguish between healthy and unhealthy alternatives to health-related issues or problems.
- 5.12.4 Generate alternatives to health-related issues or problems.
- 5.12.6 Defend the healthy choice when making decisions.

Standard 7: Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks.

- 7.12.1 Analyze the role of individual responsibility in enhancing health

Standard 8: Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family, and community health.

- 8.12 Use accurate peer and societal norms to formulate a health-enhancing message.
- 8.12.1 Demonstrate how to influence and support others to make positive health choices.
- 8.12.2 Work cooperatively as an advocate for improving personal, family, and community health.

Social and Emotional Learning Competencies

Self-awareness:

- Integrating personal and social identities
- Examining prejudices and biases
- Experiencing self-efficacy

Social Awareness:

- Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones
- Recognizing situational demands and opportunities
- Understanding the influences of organizations/systems on behavior

Responsible Decision-making:

- Demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness
- Identifying solutions for personal and social problems
- Learning to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, facts
- Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions
- Reflecting on one's role to promote personal, family, and community well-being
- Evaluating personal, interpersonal, community, and institutional impacts

Relationship Skills:

- Communicating effectively
- Practicing teamwork and collaborative problem-solving

English Language Arts: College & Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening 6-12

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas:

1. Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
2. Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
3. Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

Learning Target(s):

Students will be able to:

1. Understand new words and phrases related to HPV.
2. Explain what HPV is and how it is transmitted.
3. Understand the key risk and protective factors related to HPV-related cancers.

Success Criteria:

Students will work in groups to create an HPV health promotion item for their peers. The campaign may be in the form of a pamphlet, public service announcement (PSA), poster, etc.

Recommended Activities

Please Note: We recommend completing the following activities in the order listed to ensure a structured learning experience that builds knowledge, confidence, and leadership skills. The following was adapted with permission from The Cancer Happens® curriculum.

Activity 1: New Words and Phrases

Step 1: The troop leader will distribute a Glossary of HPV Terms to each student. Have students discuss terms with the troop leader or expert for questions and further explanation.

Step 2: The troop leader presents the HPV education slides. Please note that speaker notes are included with the slides.

Activity 2: HPV Myth Versus Fact

Step 1: The troop leader puts two posters on opposite ends of the room. One poster reads Myth, and the other poster reads Fact. Recommended statements can be found in this toolkit.

Step 2: The troop leader reads individual statements from a list of statements about HPV.

Step 3: After each statement is read, the troop leader will ask a student (or all students) to stand by the poster that represents the best answer.

Step 4: Troop leaders can call on students individually to explain why they believe or don't believe the statement.

Activity 3: HPV Health Promotion Project

Step 1: Identify key messages.

- Divide Girl Scouts into small groups and have them discuss what they believe is most important for their peers to know about HPV and cancer prevention

Step 2: Create a health promotion campaign.

- Each group will develop a health promotion item. This may include a pamphlet, poster, and/or social media post.
  - Campaigns should include:
    - What is HPV
    - Cancers caused by HPV
    - How starting the HPV vaccine at age 9 can help prevent cancer

Step 3: Share the message.

- Groups can present their campaign to the troop, display materials, or share messages within their school or community.

For a list of ideas for a health promotion campaign, see the additional Resource List on the next page of this toolkit.

Appendices HPV Glossary of Terms

The following terms are provided to support your understanding of HPV and related diseases and have been adapted with permission from Cancer Pathways and the American Cancer Society.

Cervix – The lower part of the woman's uterus, with an opening that connects the uterus to the vagina

Cervical cancer – Cancer that forms in the tissues of the cervix. It is usually slow-growing and often does not cause symptoms. Cervical cancer is almost always caused by human papillomavirus (HPV) infection. Cervical cancer screening tests include an HPV test and a Pap test. The HPV test looks for high-risk HPV infection that can lead to cervical cancer. The Pap test can find precancerous changes in the cervix so they can be treated before they become cancer.

Cervical cancer screening[10-13] – The American Cancer Society recommends women and other individuals with a cervix at average risk for cervical cancer should start screening at age 25 and continue until at least age 65. Screening should be done every 3 to 5 years, depending on the test:

- Primary HPV testing. The preferred screening option is primary HPV testing (testing only for HPV infection) on a cervical sample collected by a healthcare provider. This test should be done every 5 years.

Other options for cervical cancer screening include:

- Self-collected* HPV testing. For this test, a sample is collected by the person being screened using a soft swab inserted into the vagina. A healthcare provider still needs to order the test, and it should be done every 3 years.
- Co-testing. In some places, HPV testing is combined with a Pap test, which is a test that looks at cervical cells under a microscope. It should be done every 5 years.
- Pap test alone. If none of the other approaches are an option, screening can be done with a Pap test alone every 3 years.

*Self-collection should only be done using tests and collection devices approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA). These are only available through your healthcare provider.

Genital warts – A very common STI appearing as skin growths in the groin, genital, or anal areas. They can be different sizes and shapes. Some look like flat white patches, and others are bumpy, like tiny bunches of cauliflower. Genital warts are caused by certain types of the human papillomavirus (HPV).

HPV – Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus that is passed from one person to another during sexual intercourse and other intimate contact. It can cause genital warts and certain types of HPV can cause cervical and five other kinds of cancer. There is no antibiotic or antiviral medication that treats or cures HPV.

HPV high-risk type – A type or strain of HPV that leads to a serious health outcome, for example cancer of the cervix, penis, vagina, vulva, anus, or throat

HPV low-risk type – A type or strain of HPV that has a less harmful outcome, for example genital warts

HPV test - This test is used for cervical cancer screening and looks for infection by high-risk types of HPV that are more likely to cause precancers and cancers. The test can be done by itself (called a primary HPV test) or at the same time as the Pap test (called a co-test) (with the same swab or a second swab), to help know your risk of developing cervical cancer. The HPV test and Pap test are done the same way during a pelvic exam, unless a self-collected HPV test is done. During a pelvic exam for cervical cancer screening, a health professional uses a special tool to gently scrape or brush the cervix to remove cells for testing.

*Currently, there is no FDA-approved routine HPV screening test recommended for men.

Immunization – Refers to getting vaccinations or vaccine shots; it can mean both receiving a vaccine and becoming immune to ward off a disease as a result of immunization. Immunizations help the body make its own protection (or antibodies) against certain diseases.

Pap test – A test used to screen for cervical cancer during a pelvic exam. Cells are scraped from the cervix and looked at under a microscope. It is used to detect changes in the cells of a cervix. Changes in a cervix can be a precancer or cancer. A Pap test does not detect an HPV infection, but if an HPV test is positive, a Pap test is needed to check for any abnormal cells caused by HPV.

Self-collection – Related to HPV, this is when an HPV test for cervical cancer screening is preferred to be self-collected instead of clinician-collected. For this test, a sample is collected by the person being screened using a soft swab inserted into the vagina. It's not available everywhere yet and a health care provider still needs to order the test.

Vaccine – A substance given in an injection or shot to help the immune system recognize and protect against certain infections or diseases. Vaccines work by imitating an infection – the presence of a disease-causing organism in the body – to engage the body's natural defenses. Vaccines trick the body to think it is being attacked by a disease. The body responds by producing antibodies that remain in your system. If the body is exposed to the actual disease after the antibodies are produced, it will be protected.

Virus – Tiny germs or organisms that often cause disease. Sometimes your body can fight off the virus, and sometimes it cannot. Sometimes a virus stays in your body for the rest of your life, but you may not have any symptoms. Antibiotics do not work against viruses.

Common HPV Myths

Myth	Fact
The HPV vaccine is new, so there is no data on the long-term side effects.	The HPV vaccine has been around since 2006, and several hundred million doses have been distributed worldwide. It is safe and effective. The possible side effects have been well documented. Vaccine safety has been confirmed by the WHO, CDC, and many other organizations.[13,14]
HPV is rare.	HPV is very common—most people will be exposed at some point in their lives.[14,15]
HPV only affects women.	Studies have not found that HPV vaccines cause reproductive problems in women.[14,16] HPV can affect anyone and sometimes can lead to several types of cancer in adults.[15]
If you're healthy, you don't need the HPV vaccine.	The vaccine is to prevent infection and is most effective at preventing HPV-related cancers before exposure, even in healthy individuals.[15]
The HPV vaccine is only needed for older teens.	Getting the vaccine between ages 9 and 12 provides stronger, longer-lasting protection that getting it later.[14]

Appendices (cont'd): Common HPV Q&A

Information was adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention HPV Clinical Overview.[17]
View full resource (click to access)

Why is the HPV vaccine so important?

HPV vaccination can prevent more than 90% of cancers caused by HPV from ever developing.

How common is HPV?

About 85% of people will get an HPV infection in their lifetime. It is transmitted through sexual intercourse and other types of intimate contact. When given at recommended ages of 9-12, HPV vaccination helps protect individuals long before they are exposed to HPV.

Is the HPV vaccine safe?

Yes. The HPV vaccine has been extensively studied and is very safe. Most side effects are mild, such as soreness, redness, or swelling at the injection site, and go away within a day or two.

What does the HPV vaccine protect against?

It protects against infection with certain high-risk types of HPV that can lead to cancer, including cervical, throat, anal, vaginal, vulvar, and penile cancers.

Can the HPV vaccine treat HPV if someone already has it?

No. The vaccine prevents HPV infections but does not treat or cure existing HPV infection.

Why do recommendations say to start the HPV vaccine at a young age?

Vaccination works best in children before they are exposed to HPV. Starting earlier provides protection sooner and requires fewer doses of the vaccine.

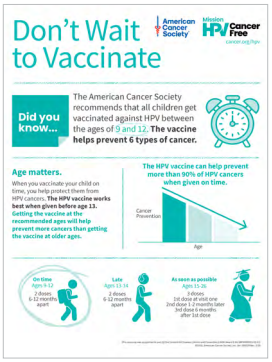
Does HPV always cause symptoms?

No. HPV often has no symptoms, which is why vaccination and prevention are so important.

Resources

Posters, Flyers, and Graphics

- American Cancer Society: Don't Wait to Vaccinate
- American Cancer Society: Prevention Matters!
- American Cancer Society: Protecting Our Children From HPV Cancers
- American Cancer Society National HPV Vaccination Roundtable: Flyers and Posters and Co-brandable Start at Age 9 Social Media Graphics





Additional Resources

- American Academy of Pediatrics: HPV Vaccines: What Parents Need to Know
- American Cancer Society: HPV Vaccines
- CDC: HPV Resources
- CDC: Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine Safety
- Immunize.org: A Parent's Guide to Preteen and Teen HPV Vaccination
- American Cancer Society: Why Age 9? Fact Sheet









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