



The importance of HPV Vaccination in Men

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ABSTRACT

I'm honored to write the editorial for this edition of the Global Journal of Medicine and Public Health. HPV (Human Papillomavirus) is well-established as the most common sexually transmitted pathogen worldwide ¹. It is primarily publicized for the potential of various strains (especially HPV16 and HPV18) to cause genital warts, precancerous neoplasias, and cervical as well as other cancers in women ¹. One will find endless studies, editorials, articles, news reports and so on, on the topic.

This is certainly a crucial topic to discuss. However, it detracts from the severe burden of cases of HPV infection and HPV-linked cancers in men each year. According to the website of the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), although HPV-linked cancers are not common in men, approximately 4 out of every 10 cases of cancer related to HPV infection occur in males ². Further, each year in the U.S., over 15,000 men develop HPV-linked cancer ². According to a 2023 study published in the Lancet, almost one-third of men over the age of 15 are infected with at least one HPV strain, and one 1 in 5 are infected with one or more of what are known as high-risk (oncogenic) HPV types ³. HPV prevalence was particularly high in young adults, with the incidence peaking in those between 25 and 29, and stabilized beyond this age range ³.

Included in these cancers are those of the head, neck, penis, anus, and oropharynx (including the base of the tongue and tonsils) ⁴. Other HPV infections may result in recurrent respiratory papillomatosis and anogenital warts ^{5,6}. The latter can take the form of warts, lumps, sores, or other unusual growths; and their size, shape, and clinical course of can vary between individuals ⁴.

Several groups of men are at higher risk; including men who have sex with men (MSM), and those who are immunocompromised due to co-infection with another virus such as HIV or on immunosuppressant medication ^{2,7}. For example, in a 2018 study of data from 25 longitudinal studies, the incidence of HPV was twice that in those living with HIV in comparison to those without, with HPV clearance being approximately half in the former group relative to the latter group ⁷. Further, a 2019 study published in BMC Infectious diseases found that "anal HPV infections were common among MSM in Cape Town with the highest HPV burden among HIV co-infected MSM, men who have sex with men only and those that practiced receptive anal intercourse ⁸."

There are currently no diagnostic or screening tests for HPV in males of any age or medical history. With that, the best course of action is preventing cancer with HPV vaccination in men . As the vaccine does not treat existing HPV infection and HPV-linked diseases, the vaccine should be administered prior to being exposed to HPV ². Following administration, it has been shown to be highly effective in preventing HPV infection and HPV-linked disease. For example, a 2022 10 year follow up study " durable effectiveness of the qHPV vaccine was demonstrated in women 27–45 years of age, and vaccine efficacy was inferred in men 27–45 years of age based on the serological results ⁹." Many such studies have shown similar results ⁹⁻¹¹. Therefore, it is crucial to raise awareness and knowledge about the importance of HPV vaccination in men to protect our fathers, brothers, partners and other male loved ones. Thanks for reading metropolis.

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