

THE MISINFORMATION WEB:

Learn How to Find and Trust Online Information about HPV Immunization.

Every day we use social media and other online sources as ways to find health-related information. Finding information helps us to make informed decisions about our health. When the information we find is incorrect, it affects our ability to make decisions that are in our best interest.



HPV IMMUNIZATION IS ESSENTIAL.

Immunization against the human papillomavirus (HPV) is one of many public health tools to help us maintain good health. Most people will get a sexually transmitted HPV infection in their lifetime and will show no symptoms, but they are likely to spread it to others through direct skin-to-skin contact. The HPV vaccine is proven to reduce the risk of infection, which if left untreated may lead to cancers and other diseases. It is most beneficial to receive the HPV vaccine before exposure to the virus, but there is still benefit to getting vaccinated regardless of past exposure.

FINDING GOOD INFORMATION ON HPV VACCINES TO HELP YOU DECIDE.

We get our information from a multitude of sources, including healthcare professionals, family, friends, books, newspapers, educational pamphlets, radio, television, etc. However, people are increasingly heading online for answers rather than pursuing all other sources. Unfortunately, online content is always changing, and searching for answers to your HPV-related questions can be overwhelming, particularly if not all sources on HPV vaccines are trustworthy, and we do not always identify the information that we find as false. This factsheet can help you decide if the information on HPV immunization that you are seeing is accurate and reliable.

TIP #1: NOT ALL INFORMATION IS CREATED EQUALLY.

Anyone can publish HPV-related information online, but there are things that you can look for to help you identify credible sources.

- When you come across new information, look for the author (organization or person). Sometimes individuals and sites exist online to sell something or to promote a certain point of view. This is okay, but you need to know their motives.
- Posts and online sources you can trust do not hide their identity. Look for text that tells you more about the author of the information that you are reading, such as their credentials, which can identify them as a credible or non-credible source. For example, affiliates of trustworthy organizations always mention which organization they represent.
- Prioritize authoritative sources. Source credibility is rooted in expertise and trustworthiness. A good source will be both – for example, a university or a health organization.

TIP #2: WHEN DISCOVERING NEW INFORMATION ABOUT HPV IMMUNIZATION, VERIFYING IF IT IS TRUE OR NOT CAN BE A CHALLENGE.

Assessing the quality of the information is difficult without critical thinking skills. It may be an opinion, a view, or a rumour or it can be a serious research result. Here are a few tips that can help you verify the quality of the information you are seeing.

- Comparing different sources is a good way to evaluate the information you discovered. Views of a single person can be biased and/or inaccurate, and like you, people change their opinions and views over time. Verifying with alternate sources can help you to know whether the information you discovered is fact or fiction.
- User-generated content is vulnerable to misinformation, which can spread farther, faster and deeper than true information because of the emotions that it might elicit such as fear, anger, shock or surprise. This is a signal that you should investigate the source of the information. For example, stories about side effects shared online are not verified but stimulate strong emotions.
- What is considered true or false is constantly changing as new evidence becomes known and as vaccine technologies are advanced. Do not be deterred by evidence-based changes to HPV vaccines. This is not misinformation, but progress in what we know about HPV prevention.
- Avoid basing the accuracy of information on “likes” and comments from other users who share the information before you have evaluated the cited information.

TIP #3: WE NEED TO USE OUR BEST JUDGEMENT.

We take in a lot of information, which may make sense only when we reflect upon what we have seen. The time between taking in information and accepting it is important, because that is enough time to potentially share something on social media or with someone we know.

- Before you share information, consider the fact that online platforms automate and personalize content based on your previous online activity and social contacts. Each time you search online, you can be exposed to the same or similar content, but from various platforms that redirect information or adapt it in different wording.
- Some of your search results may present news alongside non-news and user-generated content. This can make it difficult to identify what information is reliable.
- Keyword searching is an effective way to locate information. Knowing how to select keywords can help produce the best search results.

TIP #4: HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS ARE HERE FOR YOU.

Everyone wants to make the right choices to protect themselves and their family from harm. This task is more challenging than ever with so much information at our fingertips. Both science and history have shown that vaccines have worked to protect us from disease for more than a century.

Health care providers remain the most reliable and trusted source of immunization information. Should you have questions about HPV vaccines or about information that you have found online, they can help you assess the quality of the information discovered.

They also provide support. Fear, pain and anxiety can deter you or a family member from receiving the HPV vaccine. There are ways you can reduce pain and anxiety before, during and after immunization. Health care providers such as doctors, nurses and pharmacists play an important role in supporting you. Ask your health care provider what you can do to improve your immunization experience, or visit <https://www.cardsystem.ca>

OTHER THINGS YOU SHOULD LOOK FOR WHEN SEARCHING FOR HPV-RELATED INFORMATION ONLINE:

Is the information based on science?

Scientists discover truth by testing their findings again and again. This approach helps them to be sure that their thinking and methods are not flawed. It works to ensure that they are not making personal assumptions or that special conditions have not had an effect on the results. The most useful studies compare the findings from one group of people or cases with the findings from another group (control group). Look for words such as randomized control study or case-control study. Groups or institutions whose purpose is to uphold science, such as research ethics boards, professional associations and universities, usually endorse sound scientific studies. Look for ethics review confirmation, references and links to scientific studies. Studies that are published in peer-reviewed publications are often reputable because a group of experts without conflict of interest in the same field has reviewed the work before it is published and made available to the public.

The scientific approach takes time and is open to questions. It even finds angles that were not foreseen. Good professional researchers are not afraid to discuss both the weaknesses and strengths of their research findings. They may even say that their findings did not produce clear results or need more research. This is normal and does not indicate a conspiracy to trick or harm people.

Does the information make sense?

Sometimes information can be too good to be true. False claims are easy to believe. Beware of individuals and online sources that make broad claims such as “hidden truths” or hasty sensational claims. Online sources that do not make a clear distinction between facts and assumptions may be presenting “theories”. The media may use these “theories” as an attention-grabbing approach, but this does not mean that they are true or have any basis in science.