



Talking with parents and carers about HPV vaccination



MORE INFO

This is a quick guide only, for more detailed information see skai.org.au/healthcare-professionals.

You may be approached by a parent or carer (hereafter referred to as parent) who is concerned about their adolescent receiving the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine. This guide aims to support you to respectfully respond to those who may have strong beliefs or attitudes about HPV vaccination.

THE IMMUNISATION ENCOUNTER

You have just discussed with your patient that their adolescent is due for their HPV vaccination. The parents' hesitancy to speak, or their body language, could suggest that they are concerned, worried, shy or unsure about talking about HPV vaccination.

From experience, you know that sometimes parents think their adolescent is:

- too young for the vaccine
- not at risk of catching HPV
- only going to have one sexual partner.

What should you do?

Here are the recommended SKAI steps to help you to have a supportive vaccination conversation.

STEP

1. Elicit



'I know it feels awkward to speak about about sexual health...'

Be mindful of the parent's lived experiences.

People learn about sexual health in different ways. Some have had positive guidance from their parents or community, while others get little or no information. For others, previous negative sexual experiences can also shape how they see the topic of HPV vaccination. All of these factors can influence views and attitudes towards sexual health.

Tip 1: Self-reflection

Think back to how you first learned about sexual health.

Who taught you?

What did you first learn?

Reflecting on your own experiences can help you approach parents with additional empathy and understanding.

Avoid assumptions about the parent. Don't make assumptions or guesses about the parent's background, religion, culture or ethnicity. Instead, ask neutral questions about them or their family, and allow personal information to be brought up in its own time.

Learn to recognise discomfort or embarrassment. Talking about adolescent sexual health can feel awkward for anyone!

Parents may show discomfort by hesitating or struggling to find the right words. Acknowledge this awkwardness openly – this relieves tension and makes the conversation easier.

Tip 2: Translation support

Try to have translated resources handy or arrange for this ahead of time. If you don't know, directly ask the parent's preferred language. Some parents have limited English literacy or literacy in their own language, so relying on translated written information resources may not be enough for some parents. You may also need to arrange for an interpreter who is not the parent's child or family member.



Talking with parents and carers about HPV vaccination



STEP

2. Elicit information



'Anything you share here is private and confidential.'

'Having questions about HPV vaccination is very common.'

'I'd like to hear what worries you most about HPV vaccination.'

Explore the parent's questions or concerns.

Remind the parents that this is a private and confidential conversation. Invite them to share what's on their mind.

Use a curious tone with your questions. This shows parents you are open to their ideas and encourages them to share their concerns and questions.

Tip 3: Resist the righting reflex!

When the parent is speaking, stay quiet and let them finish. Show you are listening by nodding or with open body language. This gives parents the space to voice their concerns – and you space to gather your thoughts.

STEP

3. Acknowledge



'It sounds like you are concerned about ...'

'Many parents share this worry. You are not alone in feeling this way.'

Acknowledge and affirm. Tell the parent you value what they have shared. Use the parent's own words when you respond. This shows you were actively listening and allows you to clarify the parent's concerns and tailor your response.

Reassure the parent that their concerns are understandable and common.

STEP

4. Set the agenda



'I have information that could help address your concerns.'

'Would it be useful if I shared some of this?'

Summarise and set the agenda. Prioritise and confirm with the parent what you will discuss. Ask permission to share your information. This shifts the conversation from listening to sharing.

STEP

5. Share knowledge

Share your knowledge. Give clear, simple facts and evidence that support HPV vaccination. Choose information that best matches the parent's concerns, beliefs and values.

We have provided some examples, see [Figure 1.0](#) on the next page.

STEP

6. Recommend vaccination



'Are you happy to go ahead and vaccinate?'

Make a clear recommendation to vaccinate.

This is very powerful in encouraging the parent to vaccinate.



Talking with parents and carers about HPV vaccination



STEP

7. Close



'Does this information answer your questions or is there still something that is unclear?'

'If you want more information about what we discussed, you can visit the SKAI website. You can also contact me again or book another appointment.'

Re-check understanding and intentions. At the end of this conversation, check to see how the parent feels about HPV vaccination. This helps you confirm their understanding.

Share credible resources. Some people will take time to digest what you have told them. Share SKAI resources or other credible sources of information with the parent for them to read at home. The parent may need to contact you or another provider again. Be patient and keep offering the parent opportunities to vaccinate their adolescent against HPV.

References

References used in the development of this resource can be seen at <https://skai.org.au/healthcare-professionals/talking-parents-about-human-papillomavirus-hpv-vaccination>

FIGURE 1.0

Main concern	Early sexual activity or multiple partners	No risk of catching the virus	Too young for the vaccine
Suggested response	<i>'Research shows that adolescents who are vaccinated at younger ages do not engage in early sexual activity.'</i>	<i>'Anyone who becomes sexually active is at risk for HPV. This is because most people with an HPV infection don't have symptoms, so many don't know they have the virus.'</i>	<i>'I do not recommend waiting to vaccinate. Research shows the vaccine provides the best protection if given before an adolescent is exposed to the virus.'</i>
More details (if needed)	<i>'We also know that even adults who are sexually active with one partner can still get an HPV infection.'</i>	<i>'Research studies show that even adults who only have one partner can still get an HPV infection.'</i>	<i>'By vaccinating your adolescent on time, they are much less likely to catch HPV when they are older.'</i>
Final words	<i>'This is why it's very important to vaccinate.'</i>		