

Field Guide

Digital Dialogue for HPV
Vaccination

About This Guide

Digital Dialogue for HPV Vaccination

This guide describes some of the key elements of digital dialogue and social media engagement that may be used to promote HPV vaccination programs around the world. It highlights the key actions that need to be taken by various groups and stakeholders in HPV vaccination promotion on digital platforms.

Developing a digital strategy is an opportunity to share tailored messages with specific audiences using appropriate and relevant social media. The potential of social media to reach many specific audiences and to receive feedback while encouraging real time conversation makes it a unique tool for social and behavior change communication. A digital strategy may complement a larger demand promotion strategy or may stand on its own.

Developing an effective digital strategy includes identifying goals, developing accurate and consistent messages, identifying potential audiences (including social media allies and influencers), and establishing measurement tools to promote HPV vaccine and cervical cancer prevention using digital dialogue.

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These field guides have been developed to support country teams and partners in their HPV communication planning, rollout and monitoring. These guides are available online/offline for use and adaptation in line with local context and requirements.

To access and download the HPV Communication Field Guides, other related resources and examples, please visit <http://globalhpv.com/>

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Guide Users

This guide is intended to be used by communication specialists and program implementation staff who need information and ideas about how to prepare a digital strategy to promote HPV vaccination. This guide provides detailed actions and steps to follow in order to come up with an effective strategy for promoting HPV vaccination in various online and social media platforms.

What's in This Guide

In this guide you will find the following:

- Tips on how to create a specially tailored social media strategy.
- Key participant audiences and their unique roles on social media.
- Advice on how to schedule your social media postings to heighten visibility among followers.
- Key messages for participant audiences and some additional sources of information on effective management of social media.



What Is Digital Dialogue and Why Is It Important?

Digital dialogue is the spreading of content or information that is shared or discussed online. In recent years, nearly every country in the world has seen a dramatic increase in the use of online platforms and social media. This new trend has changed the way in which we communicate and gather information and because of this shift, the health sector also lives and works within a new reality.

Social media use is high among adolescents and young to middle-aged adults, thus it has become a potent path to reach and influence adolescents and caregivers, as well as for them to pass messages along to their peers and parents or children respectively. The sharing of information amongst peers is both common and influential, and finding ways to use those social media platforms to share facts about HPV and have discussions with young people and caregivers about the HPV vaccine may provide additional opportunities to shape current and future vaccine-related beliefs and behaviors.

Because of the efficacy of social media for transmitting visually appealing and efficiently packaged messages in real time to millions of people, it has become an important and innovative tool for behavior and social change. As such, it is a must-have tool for increasing the uptake of HPV vaccination and preventing cervical cancer. All it takes is one tweet, a Facebook post, or a digitally enhanced image to potentially change the minds of millions of people when it comes to HPV immunization and the adoption of the vaccine to save the lives of young girls and women.

While social media has this potential to be a vehicle of positive messages about HPV vaccination, it also has the potential to be disruptive if negative messages and rumours are propagated online and find their way into traditional media. Therefore, regular monitoring of social media and immediate response to misinformation and rumours with facts is a very important part of the social media strategy. All negative posts on social media related to HPV vaccination must be promptly addressed with facts within the platforms where they were disseminated.



Overarching Actions and Guidance

Just like the development of a good communication strategy, the development of an effective digital strategy should be done systematically.



Step 1: Identify the main goals

The first step is to identify the primary objectives of your digital strategy. When you begin identifying goals, be sure to involve the rest of the members of your organization. Ensure that all members of the team are familiar with the key facts about HPV, the HPV vaccine, and cervical cancer.

Goals to consider might include:

- Generate dialogue about the benefits of HPV vaccination
- Generate dialogue around HPV vaccine uptake among adolescents
- Garner the attention and trust of others who are hesitant about vaccination
- Build a group of well-informed and influential people to spread accurate information

Once you have created some broad goals, use them to create a set of SMART objectives. SMART communication objectives are those that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. The Text Box below provides an example of a SMART objective that is connected to behavior change.

At this point, you should also decide who will manage specific social media platforms. Depending on the size of your organization and the interaction from members of your social media audiences, you may need to appoint more than one person to manage your digital dialogues. While using social media for sharing personal information with friends and family might seem easy to most people, managing a digital dialogue across multiple platforms can quickly become overwhelming. Be sure that you have adequate capacity in your organization to effectively create social media content, respond to comments and questions, and interact with the audience. A clear division of responsibilities and structure is imperative to creating a successful strategy.

Two SMART Communication Objectives for Digital Dialogue

“Within 3 months after the launch of the digital strategy, 75% of girls age 13-15 who interact with our Facebook page will report that they believe the HPV vaccine will protect them from cervical cancer.”

“Within 6 months after the launch of the digital strategy, 75% of girls who interact with our Facebook page will report that they intend to get the HPV vaccine.”



Step 2: Identify your audience(s) and potential social media allies and influencers

Once you have identified the goals of the strategy, it is time to define your audience and your potential social media allies and influencers. An influencer is a person who has established credibility in a specific field and is well known on social media. They normally have access to a large audience and can persuade others. Examples of influencers might be national celebrities, experts in the health field who have access to specific audiences, or religious leaders who use social media to spread their opinions. Finding the right influencer is key to creating a successful social media campaign. Make a list of who those people and organizations are and which platforms they use. Take into consideration that different audiences respond to different practices and channels.

Other allies might include partner organizations that have established credibility in the public health field. Allies and influencers can help your organization to gain credibility and reach wider audiences. For instance, if one of the goals of your digital strategy is to gain trust of those who are hesitant about vaccination, building a relationship with a relevant influencer might help bridge the gap.

It is important that you examine potential allies and influencers on social media prior to including them in your digital strategy. Some posts that may have been innocuous at one time may be seen negatively if they are unearthed during a vaccination campaign. Old posts may also reflect previously held biases, prejudice, or other negative views about certain groups of people, vaccination, or health campaigns. People's views often change as they are exposed to new ideas and information, but if an opponent of a vaccination program finds old posts that portray your organization or allies in a negative way, it may have a detrimental effect on the vaccination program. Therefore, be sure to vet potential social media influencers thoroughly. Read through their old posts, ask if they have had any alternative accounts, and be sure that you are familiar with their history on social media.

Useful practices to build social media engagement, and build a network of social media allies:

Best Practices for Content

- Use compelling visuals, videos, and infographics.
- Post Photos: photos have been shown to be the most popular type of social media content for engagement.
- Think of ways to reach girls with language and visuals they can relate to and have fun with. The best way to do this is by doing research with girls prior to launching your digital strategy and asking them about what types of online content are most interesting for them.
- Create hashtags using key words. Include different kind of hashtags and use a mix of hashtags in your posts. Some might be more informative; others might be a call to action. Address different

audiences with your hashtags. Examples of hashtags you might use include: #hpvaccine #cervicalcancer #infection #women #girls #men #vaccineswork.

- Use terms that your audiences will understand and be prepared to answer questions accurately and empathetically.
- Learn the trending topics surrounding routine HPV immunization and monitor them. This can help you determine what content is most likely to be shared, gain followers, and motivate people to believe in the safety, effectiveness and importance of HPV vaccination.
- Provide the general public with practical information related to their specific area and living environment, such as when and where vaccination is happening in their town.

Best Practices for Connecting to Audiences

- Share facts and information from credible sources, such as the WHO, UNICEF, and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).
- Create informational campaigns on important days. For instance, use the International Day of the Girl to generate dialogue about the myths and misconceptions about HPV vaccine.
- Engage with youth-led organizations by liking their pages and following their updates. Building relationships with these people and organizations can help you track your progress because you can follow up with questions about HPV and the HPV vaccine.
- Monitor popular culture and youth trends. This can help you identify opportunities to engage with influencers in your context and post content that is relevant for youth.
- Use real-life stories. Personal experiences might help parents better understand the importance of HPV vaccination and be more comfortable with their decision to vaccinate their child. Remember, though, that you should never share stories online (or elsewhere) without a person's informed consent, and you should never share stories about people under the age of 18. See following Text Box for ideas about the Ethics of Posting Online.

The Ethics of Posting Personal Stories Online

Because posts on social media can be found years after they are initially created, it is critically important that you do not share stories about people online without their informed consent. Informed consent means that people know why and where their information will be shared. If you do decide to post a personal story after receiving informed consent, you should change people's names and identifying details.

You should never share information online about people under the age of 18, even if they give you permission.

Best Practices for Engaging with Allies

- Consider creating a network map of key actors involved in vaccination programs in your context. Examine their social media use and trends. Identify locally-trusted people and institutions in your community that have endorsed the vaccine and consider following them online. Use this approach to build a network of potential allies.
- Follow the social media accounts of other organizations that are promoting HPV vaccination. Study the way they reach their audiences, the way they communicate, and their storytelling strategy.
- Engage in the social media spaces of professionals who work with adolescents, such as health workers or teachers. Provide them with credible information about cervical cancer, vaccination, and child immunization. Build a relationship of trust.
- Share with your partners your digital strategy and messages. Align and build cohesive messages with them.

Best Practices for Addressing Rumours and Misconceptions

- Identify anti-vaccine groups, and post in the same platforms they post when appropriate.
- Follow and monitor people who are critical of vaccine programs and the HPV vaccine. Respond to their posts when appropriate; when you do respond, be sure that you share facts and try to create space for discussions.
- Write compelling posts addressing misconceptions and misunderstandings about HPV vaccination. Challenge misconceptions, such as the idea that the vaccine would encourage promiscuity.
- Map the dynamics and the social media trends of anti-vaccination advocates. (Take a look at the Field Guide - HPV Risk and Crisis Management for strategies on how to ensure that the correct information cuts through the clutter of rumours).
- Build a social media emergency response plan should a crisis emerge, such as widespread reporting of an adverse event or questionable vaccine quality.



Step 3: Find the right channels

It is important that you find the appropriate channels for interacting with audiences. Not all social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn, etc.) will serve your goals and target your audience(s) equally well. It is important to do research and find out what fits your strategy best. For instance, if you live in a country with good Internet access and usage, you should consider dedicating a section of your website to HPV vaccination.

Useful practices to identify the right channels:

- **Research the behaviors and preferences of the target audience(s).** For instance, to engage youth in HPV conversations, it is key to pay special attention to the content they produce, their favorite social media platforms, the way they communicate, the information

they are posting, and how and when they are posting it.

- **Research social media age demographics and statistics in your particular context.** Youth might be more keen to use Instagram stories to communicate while their parents might be more comfortable using platforms such as Facebook or Twitter.

After you have identified the appropriate platforms for the audiences you plan to reach, you can start developing content to reach those audiences.



Step 4: Start developing content and find your voice and tone

Before posting, you must develop a consistent voice in your communications. Think ahead about the tone you want to adopt. Some organizations and individuals prefer to keep their communication online more informative and serious while others prefer to adopt a more informal tone. While the tone and style you use in social media should not be completely different from the one you use for your website, advertising, and other materials, in general, social media can be more casual.

When developing content, remember to share a consistent message in your communications. If you communicate on different digital platforms, such as a WhatsApp group chat or a Facebook page, make sure that the messages disseminated across platforms are consistent. Good practice for digital dialogue would include developing a list of core messages and using this list as a guideline for posts across all platforms.

Use practical information in your communication and think of facts and real-life stories. Take into consideration that there is no magic formula for HPV vaccine messaging, and it will vary between and within countries.

Remember, these messages will vary depending on the context.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN DEVELOPING CONTENT:

- Is the language or design appropriate for illiterate populations?
- Is the language or design appropriate for minorities or hard-to-reach girls?
- Are you using a call to action?
- Are you providing opportunities for people to engage in dialogue with you, your organization, or each other about the HPV vaccine, cervical cancer, or cancer prevention?

Practical information to promote HPV vaccination and cervical cancer prevention might include:

- Information about the HPV vaccine and cervical cancer.
- Locations and times that the vaccination is available.
- Basic evidence about cervical cancer incidence rates in your country and why it is important. For example: Cervical cancer is one of most common cancers affecting women. It is the (x) highest cause of cancer in women in our country.
- Evidence about HPV prevalence.
- Evidence about vaccine safety: “the HPV vaccine is approved and licensed by the national authorities” or “it is recommended by WHO.”
- Reminders directed to parents of adolescents who are due for a dose of the HPV vaccine.
- Practical questions directed to parents and youth. Some of the questions might include: Do you have any questions about the HPV vaccine? Do you know people in your community who have been vaccinated? What are some of the reasons to get vaccinated against HPV?
- Information about the cost, or if the vaccine is free of charge.
- Locally-trusted people and institutions who have endorsed the vaccine.
- Messages about cervical cancer

screening, adolescent health or routine immunization.

- Personal experiences such as a visit to a vaccination center.
- Information about side effects. For instance: “Like other vaccines and medicines, the HPV vaccine can produce mild side effects, such as redness, swelling or soreness in the arm where the injection is given. Some people also experience headache, mild fever, aches in joints or muscles or temporary nausea. These side effects usually last less than a day and are not dangerous.”

Social media posting tips:

- Decide how often you will post and how many times per day. Stick to your plan and post consistently. A good rule of thumb is you might want to spend at least an hour a day maintaining a social media presence. If your social media is quite active, you’ll need to increase this.
- Cite your sources. Use hashtags, names, or links when doing this. For example, the @ symbol before a Twitter username sends a direct message to that user. Be sure to give credit to influencers with “@username,” or “thanks @username.”
- Make sure you have the right facts and information before posting. Keep up to date with information being posted by credible sources. Make sure that you are posting the same messages as official institutions and national health organizations.

Social media scheduling tips:

With social media, as with other communications channels, you have to plan ahead and stay organized. Choosing the best time for your social media updates can ensure engagement with your audiences. Studying the specific times in which parents, caregivers, school teachers or religious leaders engage in social media might help you generate a meaningful digital dialogue.

- **In order to stay organized**, create a social media schedule template. This

can help you break down your daily and weekly social media tasks. There are free social media scheduling tools that allow you to post in advance across a number of different social media platforms.

- **In order to optimize your social media schedule**, you should choose the best time for your social media updates and study the trends in your area of influence. For example, recent studies show that Saturdays are the best day to share on Facebook, and weekends are the best days to Tweet. Please take note that these trends change in every region and depending on each particular context.



Step 5: Measure your efforts

Social media and digital analytics are crucial to track efforts and success. By using social media analytics, you gain information on what your audiences respond to, how they respond, when they respond, and why.

There are two areas in which you should track your progress on social media. First, consider what are called Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). You and your team should decide on what you consider the KPIs for your online strategy, but examples might include number of followers, number of likes, number of comments, number of responses to comments, and other indicators related to people’s interaction with the content you post. Of course, you’ll also want to keep track of your own actions on social media —how often you’re posting, responding to comments, and engaging in dialogue with audience members.

The second area in which you should measure progress is whether your digital dialogue is leading to changes in behaviors related to the HPV vaccine. Of course, the main indicator is whether or not girls 9–14, and 15 years or older are seeking vaccination. But you can also use social media to interact with audience members to see how their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about the HPV vaccine are changing. Ask questions of your audience; conduct polls and engage in dialogue yourself to increase your understanding of people’s concerns about the vaccine and whether they are planning to get vaccinated.



How to Support Digital Dialogue and Vaccination

Ensure that information that you are offering is accurate and vaccines are available. You have to make sure to double check that the information that you provide is up to date. Failing to do so can cause lack of interest, loss of credibility, and may create false expectations.

Make sure you address community members' concerns and misconceptions, and that you are responding accurately through your digital platforms. Designate a response team or person who will be responsible for decisions and who will manage the social media channels. Respond as early as possible and offer clear information.

Designate a social media crisis management team. Decide who will be tasked with responding to negative comments. Create a timeline for a communication response to Adverse Events Following Immunization (AEFIs). Create a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page that can address some common misconceptions and rumors.

Create interaction. Having updates and sharing information is not enough to create engagement. You have to participate in conversations.

Have a social media team, and a digital strategy. The purpose of this guide is to provide you with information and ideas about developing a plan for digital dialogue. Once you have a plan, stick to it until you have data that suggests you need to change it. Make sure all team members know their roles in creating and maintaining your online presence.

Engage with participant audiences. Much of the health information found online and on social media is helpful, but there is also a lot of inaccurate and misleading information posted by anti-vaccine advocates. This makes the online presence of reliable institutions and influencers more important than ever. Because of social media, it has never been easier for people to get involved in important discussions about the benefits of HPV vaccination. In order to eradicate cervical cancer, we need well-informed and influential people to spread the right information and garner the attention and trust of others who are hesitant about vaccination and who might come across the wrong kind of information online and through open-for-all social media platforms.

The following section contains some key messages and actions that may be appropriate for participant audiences in your context.

Messages and Actions for Individuals Who Can Influence Conversations Online: Parents, girls, and the general public

1. Encourage your social media community to vaccinate their daughters against HPV.
2. Make sure you have the correct information before posting.
3. Stay up to date with the information being posted by credible sources.
4. When posting, name or tag credible sources.
5. Join and post in social media platforms that are frequently visited by other parents. Popular platforms might include WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or others!
6. Look at other successful social media accounts, specifically health promoting accounts, and mirror their social media strategies.
7. Find out who leads conversations online and get in touch with them to share key facts about HPV vaccination and its benefits, and to encourage them to share this information with their online followers.
8. Find out about trending online topics in your community and use them as an entry point to start a conversation about HPV vaccination.
9. When posting messages online about HPV vaccination consider mentioning some of the details provided at the end of this guide in regards to the HPV vaccine.

Messages and Actions for Organizations with an Online Presence: Religious groups, educational groups, health center staff, and other professionals. Groups like yours can contribute to protecting girls from cervical cancer and saving lives because they tend to gather a large following.

1. Encourage other leaders and social influencers in your community to promote HPV vaccination.
2. Encourage other existing influential groups in your community, such as women's groups, to promote HPV vaccination.
3. Address community members' concerns and misconceptions; provide correct information on HPV vaccination.
4. Find out in what specific social media networks parents are gathering and post

in those networks. Also promote HPV vaccination in the social media outlet your organization already uses.

5. Make sure that you are posting the same messages as official institutions and national health organizations are posting.
6. Use the same platforms as anti-vaccine groups to post correct messages that counter negative messages and rumours.
7. When endorsing the HPV vaccine online consider mentioning some of the information provided at the end of this guide in regards to the HPV vaccine.

Messages and Actions for Social Media Influencers:

YouTube stars, bloggers, Instagram celebrities, and other well-known online personalities

1. Inform your social media followers about the HPV vaccine and the important role the vaccine plays in cervical cancer prevention.
2. Post the correct information about HPV and the benefits of vaccination from credible sources, e.g., Ministry of Health and UN agencies.
3. When posting, name or tag credible sources.
4. Encourage caregivers with daughters to have their daughters vaccinated.
5. Know what are the trending topics surrounding routine HPV immunization.
6. Post messages using the visual style and language that you usually use when posting on social media—your audience already identifies with and trusts your voice.
7. Post in all available social media platforms, specifically the ones most frequented by girls and parents.
8. Post content that directly addresses controversial messages and provide clarification on queries raised about HPV vaccination based on the facts.
9. Engage with your audience through HPV-related online polls or quizzes.
10. When endorsing the HPV vaccine in your social media channels consider mentioning the information provided at the end of this guide regarding the HPV vaccine.

Examples of Digital Dialogue and Good Practices

- ▶ In Ukraine, a well-known pediatrician named Evgeniy Komarovskiy posted frequent messages with supportive views towards general child immunization, which proved to be a unique social engagement media opportunity due to her large following. Her public Facebook page has around 796,340 followers, her personal Facebook page has 96,462 followers, and her Vkontakte, a social media platform popular in Ukraine, has 387,906 followers. After her posting, many others in her field started spreading similar messages online and a year later child immunization became a general and enforced practice in Ukraine, when in the past routine immunization hadn't been considered.
- ▶ In 2010, Washington state ranked 46th among U.S. states in immunization rates, but two years later they ranked 5th. Their success was due to the implementation of social media initiatives and principles to guide the development of a campaign that targeted parents who were expecting or currently had a child up to age 24 months and were hesitant towards immunizations. The application of social media involved formative research with parents in this group to identify barriers and facilitators of vaccination. Communication materials and messages that addressed myths or misunderstandings related to immunization recommendations, and engagement/inclusion of health-care providers were used to better focus online conversations with parents to address their specific questions and concerns.
- ▶ Researchers in Peru created non-public Facebook groups for the uptake of HIV testing. The groups were joined by members of both the intervention side and the control side. However, intervention groups included trained peer leaders who attempted to discuss with other members the importance of HIV prevention and testing, whereas the online community in which control group participants joined had no peer leaders, and participants simply received HIV testing information. Thus, intervention groups were subject to a more intensive social media intervention than control groups. These social media interventions represented an enhancement of standard of care provided by local community clinics and government organizations in Lima, which entails providing HIV prevention and testing services for public use.
- ▶ Almost a third of staff at South Tees Hospitals Foundation Trust in the UK got their flu vaccine within 10 days of the start of a hard-hitting campaign. The trust photographed real-life patients “who have enough of a fight on their hands” without “having to fight flu” for an emotive poster and social media campaign using the hashtag #Flutober. The hard-hitting tactics worked with 600 more staff vaccinated compared to the same period in the previous year.
- ▶ Twitter users were invited to ‘like this tweet to see what happens next’ in a special campaign for the British Heart Foundation that shows their chances of surviving cardiac arrest (coronary heart disease is the UK’s single biggest killer). The goal of the campaign was to raise awareness of the issue and drive conversation on #RestartAHeart day. Working closely with Twitter, the British Heart Foundation was able to use Twitter’s heart button creatively as part of its campaign. A British Heart Foundation gets users to imagine their heart stops and invites them to like the tweet to see what happens next. The ‘like’ icon on Twitter is a heart. If the user takes up the invitation, Twitter’s auto-reply functionality serves up a response based on the statistic that less than one in ten people survive a cardiac arrest. Over seven days there were 47K #RestartAHeart mentions globally, and a year on year increase of 1163% in UK mentions of #RestartAHeart.

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Digital Dialogue Tips

Even in the already globalized digital world, not everything works the same for everybody. It is important that as a digital content creator you consider the social behaviors of the region you're operating in and the specific social media platforms used in your region before implementing any social media strategy. It is always better to come up with a tailor-made social media and communication plan that works more effectively for your region. The following is a list of practices that are key for building social media engagement no matter where you are or what platform is being used:

1. Increase the presence of credible facts and information within social media networks ideally in the form of compelling visuals and infographics.
2. Create or support sharing and posting on less visited social networks with the word "vaccination" in the headline. It is easier for wrong information to be published in less visited social media platforms and therefore it is very important to spread correct information on those platforms as well.
3. Engage in the social media spaces of professionals working regularly with adolescents, such as health workers, teachers, etc., providing them with credible information about cervical cancer, vaccination, and child immunization.
4. If you communicate on different social media platforms, such as a WhatsApp group chat or a Facebook page, make sure that the messages disseminated across the different platforms are consistent.
5. Find out which social media platforms parents use the most in order to reach caregivers. Engage parents in HPV vaccination related discussions and address concerns and questions that may come up.
6. Monitor the digital location, dynamics, and influence of anti-vaccination advocates on social media. If anti-vaccination advocates are active on social media, please refer to the Field Guide: HPV Risk and Crisis Communication for strategies on how to ensure that the correct information cuts through the clutter of rumours.
7. Provide the general public with localized and practical information related to their specific area and living environment, such as when and where vaccination is being administered in their town.
8. Plan effective communication on social media in advance of the HPV vaccination campaign rollout. Posting on social media should begin at least two weeks prior to launch of the vaccine rollout.
9. Ensure that the government and immunization partners have an emergency response plan with a strong social media component, before a crisis emerges, such as widespread reporting of an adverse event or questionable vaccine quality.

Continue comprehensive monitoring of social media networks and online conversations in order to draw conclusions about what works and what doesn't work for your specific region. Careful monitoring can help you determine what kinds of content is most likely to be shared, amass followers, and motivate people to believe in the safety, effectiveness, and importance of HPV vaccination.

Conclusion and Additional Resources

Establishing a digital dialogue with key audiences can be an effective way to share practical information about HPV vaccination and cervical cancer prevention. It can also help clarify misunderstandings and misconceptions regarding HPV vaccine, provide information regarding access to vaccines and health services, and ultimately influence individuals to adopt vaccine seeking behaviors. Remember that effective digital communication should be based on a plan that is supported with evidence. Evidence can come from social media itself, or from research you do with your target audience.

Facts About Cervical Cancer and HPV

- Cervical cancer is one of the most common cancers affecting women. 350,000 women died of cervical cancer in 2022.¹
- Cervical cancer is one of many diseases that afflict the poor disproportionately. 94% of worldwide deaths from cervical cancer occurred among women living in low and middle-income countries, mainly due to lack of access to screening and treatment facilities.²
- Cervical cancer affects the cervix, part of a woman's uterus (womb).
- Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the primary cause of cervical cancer
- HPV is highly transmissible. The majority of the population who are sexually active, will become infected with HPV during their lives. Most HPV infection clears naturally, but in some cases, these infections will persist over years and go on to cause cervical cancer.
- Cervical cancer can impact child bearing as surgical removal of the womb may be required.³
- There are different types of HPV. HPV 16 and 18 are responsible for the majority of cervical cancer cases. Vaccines protect against these specific types of HPV.



Facts About HPV Vaccination and Cervical Cancer Prevention

- Cervical cancer can be prevented through HPV vaccination of girls, and cervical cancer screening and treatment of women.
- HPV vaccine is highly effective at preventing HPV infections, precancerous lesions, and most forms of cervical cancer.
- By 2022, over 130 countries had introduced HPV vaccines into national immunization programs.⁴ Governments in many countries offer HPV vaccine free of charge through immunization programs.
- The vaccine is most effective if administered to girls before exposure to HPV that occurs with sexual debut. WHO recommends girls aged 9 to 14 years old as the primary cohort for vaccination with a one or two dose schedule.⁵
- For girls aged 15 or older, or those with a compromised immune system, three doses within 12 to 15 months are recommended (typically given at 0, 2, and 6 months; but the second dose can be given at up to 6 months after the first dose).
- HPV vaccines are safe, effective and reliable. WHO Advisory Committee for Vaccine Safety has closely monitored the safety of HPV vaccines reviewing data and studies from all over the world. A WHO 2017 review of over 270 million doses of HPV vaccine concluded the vaccine has an excellent safety profile and no major adverse events.
- HPV vaccine is delivered with an auto-disposable (AD) syringe that is used only once and then must be safely disposed.
- HPV vaccine does not impact fertility or promote promiscuity. It is a vaccine that protects against cervical cancer.
- Evidence shows that countries with national HPV vaccination programs with high coverage have a significant reduction in new infections and cervical cancer cases over time.
- Like all other vaccines, the HPV vaccination can produce mild side effects, such as redness, swelling or soreness in the arm where the injection is given. Some people also experience headache, mild fever, aches in joints or muscles or temporary nausea. These side effects usually last a day or two and are not dangerous. If symptoms persist, the person should consult their local clinic or hospital immediately.

Endnotes

- 1 IARC 2022 <https://www.iarc.who.int/cancer-type/cervical-cancer/>
- 2 <https://www.iarc.who.int/cancer-type/cervical-cancer/>
- 3 Cancer Research UK, Available at <https://www.cancerresearchuk.org/about-cancer/cervical-cancer/living-with/fertility>
- 4 <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/immunization-coverage>
- 5 WHO HPV Vaccines Position Paper: Dec 2022

