

HPV Unpacked

Session Leader Notes

Recommended for:

Key stage 3, 4 and above

Session duration:

45mins – 1 hour

Learning Objectives

By the end of the session students will:

1. Be able to explain what HPV is, how it spreads, and its potential health risks.
2. Understand the role of the HPV vaccine, why it's recommended early, and how to access it.
3. Feel empowered to discuss HPV openly, reduce stigma, and make informed health choices.

Session Expectations

- Listen to each other.
- No personal comments towards others.
- Respect any questions that are asked.
- Engage and try to enjoy the learning.

Materials Needed

- Projector or smartboard for playing the video (5–7 minutes long).
- Handouts: Fact sheet on HPV (available along with this session plan)
- Flipchart/whiteboard and markers for group brainstorming.
- Optional: Anonymous question box (for shy participants) and stickers/prizes for quiz winners.

Session outline and notes



1. Introduction (10 minutes)

Start with a quick poll: (raise hands or use digital tool if available): “How many of you have heard of HPV? What do you think it stands for?”

Introduce the Fir Vale School HPV film (<https://youtu.be/ppAHwt7gXcM>): “This short film shows Year 8 students just like you, chatting with nurses about HPV – asking real questions that you might have.”

2. Watch and reflect on the film (15 minutes)

Watch the video: The video features students from Fir Vale school interviewing Lauren, an immunisation nurse on topics like what the vaccine does, how it works, why it’s given at age 12-13, how HPV spreads via skin contact, and its link to preventable cancers like cervical and throat cancer.

Immediate reflection: Pause for 1 minute after watching and ask students to note down: “one thing that surprised me, or I didn’t know before” or “one question I still have.” Then share 3-4 volunteers’ responses to start a discussion.

3. Interactive discussion and myth busting!

Guided Discussion: Use prompts inspired by the film’s student questions to unpack key topics. Facilitate in small groups (4-6) then share feedback with the whole group OR use hands up/cold call for initial response and then unpick in more depth.

What is HPV? (A common virus that infects skin and mucous membranes.)

More context: HPV (Human Papillomavirus) has over 200 types; most are harmless and clear up on their own, but high-risk types can, over time, cause cancer (e.g., 99% of cervical cancers are HPV-related) or warts (genital or common).

How does HPV spread? (Skin-to-skin contact.)

More context: Mainly through intimate skin contact during sex (vaginal, anal, oral) but not always requiring penetration. HPV is very common – most people get it without knowing, as there’s often no symptoms.

What are the symptoms and risks of HPV? (Focus on long-term risks.)

More context: Many have none; others get warts. Key risk: Certain types lead to cancers years later if untreated. Early vaccination and screening (like cervical screenings from age 25) prevent this.

Session outline and notes



How can we protect ourselves and prevent HPV? (Why vaccinate in year 8?)

More context: The HPV vaccine (Gardasil) protects against 9 high-risk types, 1 dose is given from age 12–13 (ideally before sexual activity starts). It's 90%+ effective against related cancers. Free in the UK via school or if they miss it at school, they can ask their GP; side effects are mild (sore arm).

Myth-Busting!

Quick tips for discussion:

- HPV is very common and most people clear it naturally.
- Vaccination is the best prevention; it's safe, effective, and free in schools (UK NHS program).

1) **Myth:** HPV is rare and only affects people who have lots of different sexual partners.

Fact: HPV is very common – nearly everyone who's sexually active will get it at some point, often without knowing. (From the film: Nurses explain it's about skin-to-skin contact, not number of partners.)

2) **Myth:** HPV only affects girls and women.

Fact: HPV affects everyone – boys and men can get throat, mouth, anal, or penile cancers from it. Vaccination protects all genders equally.

3) **Myth:** If you don't have symptoms, you don't have HPV.

Fact: Most HPV infections have no symptoms at all – it's often "silent" and clears on its own in 1–2 years. You can still spread it unknowingly. (Like the film says: No signs doesn't mean no risk.)

4) **Myth:** You can only get HPV from full sexual intercourse.

Fact: HPV spreads through any intimate skin-to-skin contact (vaginal, anal, oral) or sharing sex toys – penetration isn't required.

5) **Myth:** Genital warts from HPV always lead to cancer.

Fact: Warts are usually harmless (benign) and treatable; only certain high-risk HPV types can lead to cancer over time if left untreated.

6) **Myth:** You can't get the HPV vaccine if you're older than 13 or already infected.

Fact: It's recommended up to age 25, and even if you've had HPV, it protects against other strains you haven't encountered.

Session outline and notes



7) **Myth:** A cervical screening protects against all HPV risks.

Fact: Screening detects changes early, but vaccination prevents infection in the first place. Combine both for best protection.

8) **Myth:** Once you have HPV, there's no treatment and you're stuck with it forever.

Fact: There is no cure for the virus itself, but your body clears most infections naturally. If HPV is found, more frequent screenings will be offered. Warts or cell changes can be treated, and there's no treatment needed for cases with no symptoms.

9) **Myth:** Condoms fully prevent HPV.

Fact: Condoms reduce risk but don't cover all skin, so they're not 100% effective. Vaccination is the top prevention tool.

Takeaway Message:

Talk to a nurse or doctor if you're worried or unsure – like the students in the film did. For more information: Visit [NHS.uk/HPV](https://www.nhs.uk/HPV). Remember, HPV is common, but preventable.

Group Brainstorm on board/ flipchart: Ask

- "How can we support friends getting vaccinated?"
- "What would you say to a friend, who had doubts about getting vaccinated?"
- "How could you reassure and convince them?"

4. Quick-fire quiz (15 minutes)

Use the below Q&As in teams or individually, with participants answering verbally or on paper.

Q&As:

Q – True or False: HPV stands for Human Papillomavirus, and it's a rare virus that only affects adults.

A – False. HPV is Human Papillomavirus, but it's very common – about 80% of sexually active people get it at some point, often in their teens or early adulthood.

Q – Multiple Choice: How does HPV mainly spread?

- a) Through coughing or sneezing
- b) Through skin-to-skin contact during intimate activities
- c) Through sharing food or drinks
- d) Through swimming in pools

A – b) Through skin-to-skin contact. This includes vaginal, anal, or oral sex, but not always penetration.

The film stresses it's not just "sex" in the traditional sense.

Session outline and notes



Q - Name at least two health risks associated with certain types of HPV if left untreated.

A - Warts (genital or common) and cancers (e.g., cervical, throat, anal).

High-risk HPV strains can lead to these over many years if the infection persists.

Q - True or False: Most people who get HPV will show immediate symptoms like warts or rashes.

A - False. Many HPV infections have no symptoms at all, which is why it's often called a "silent" virus. People can spread it without knowing.

Q - Multiple Choice: Why is the HPV vaccine recommended for young people around age 12-13

- a) Because it's only effective after puberty
- b) To protect before potential exposure to the virus through sexual activity
- c) To make sure it hurts less when you're younger
- d) Because older people can't get it

A - b) To protect before potential exposure to the virus through sexual activity. The vaccine works best before any contact with HPV, and the film explains why it's given early in schools.

Q - What does the HPV vaccine protect against, and how effective is it at preventing related cancers?

A - It protects against 9 high-risk HPV strains that cause warts and cancers: it's over 90% effective at preventing related cancers when given early.

Q - True or False: HPV only affects girls and women, so boys don't need the vaccine.

A - False. HPV can cause throat and other cancers in boys/men too, so vaccination is recommended for all genders to protect everyone.

Q - Multiple Choice: If someone has HPV, can their body usually clear it on its own?

- a) No, it always requires medication
- b) Yes, in most cases within 1-2 years
- c) Only if they get the vaccine after infection
- d) It depends on their blood type

A - b) Yes, in most cases within 1-2 years. The immune system often fights it off, but vaccination prevents the risky strains from taking hold.

Q - Besides vaccination, name one other way to help prevent HPV-related health issues.

A - Regular screenings (like cervical screenings from age 25) or using barriers like condoms during sex.

Session outline and notes



Q - True or False: Getting the HPV vaccine means you don't need regular health screenings like cervical screenings later in life.

A - False. Vaccination is key, but screenings catch any issues early. NHS guidance stresses combining both for full protection.

5. Conclusion and takeaways (5 minutes)

Key messages recap:


- HPV is common but preventable – get vaccinated!
- Talk about it: asking questions reduces fear and embarrassment.

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that's what our movement is all about!**

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