

Preventing Oropharyngeal Cancer and the Importance of Vaccinations

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The 2022 Code Maintenance Committee recently approved codes for the administration of the HPV vaccine, which will appear in the American Dental Association's *CDT 2023 Dental Procedure Codes* publication. States are pursuing modifications to their dental practice acts concerning vaccines. Oregon became the first state to allow dentists to offer any vaccination to a patient. Illinois allow dentists to vaccinate for Influenza and Covid-19 in adults. Many states are considering drafting legislation to include the HPV vaccination.

Oropharyngeal cancer is the most prevalent HPV-attributable cancer, and now dentists have the power to prevent rather than treat its devastating sequela. Whether dentists refer to or administer the vaccine in their offices, they should actively promote this lifesaving vaccine. *Cancer Prevention Through HPV Vaccination: An Action Guide for Dental Health Care Providers*, created by the National HPV Vaccination Roundtable, provides five action steps for HPV vaccination promotion outlined below.

Action Step 1 - Know your unique roll

86% of children ages 2-17 visit the dentist each year¹ and dentists routinely see adolescents more frequently than physicians. Many parents will have questions or concerns about vaccines and may be influenced by erroneous but convincing social media messaging.

Listen and respectfully address these concerns, and share your professional and personal stories about why we need to prevent oropharyngeal cancer. It is important to note that approximately 70% of oropharyngeal cancers are due to HPV. This does not imply the vaccine will prevent all oropharyngeal cancer. ISDS offers a patient brochure on oral cancer to assist in the discussion.

Action Step 2 - Practice cancer prevention

Recommend the "cancer prevention" vaccine in your office and on social media. By leading with cancer prevention and not HPV, we can more easily engage parents and avoid discussing sexual activity. Begin by inquiring about vaccines on your medical history.

Seeing it in writing will emphasize their importance and help you initiate the vaccine discussion. Include the vaccine recommendation when providing anticipatory guidance. Sandwiching this recommendation between two well-known and accepted procedures has increased acceptance. The American Cancer Society recommends children begin the series at age nine when only two doses are needed. For those 15 years and older, three doses are required.

Action Step 3 - Refer patients for vaccination.

Refer patients to their pediatricians/family physicians and follow up at their next visit. Create a list of physicians, health departments, and community clinics on-hand for those patients without a medical home.

Action Step 4 - Collaborate

It's one thing to refer to other health care providers, but by partnering with them, you can help ensure the continuum of care. As you refer to their medical home, they should refer the patient to your dental home for quality oral health care.

Action Step 5 - Engage your team.

Create a culture of cancer prevention in the hearts and minds of all team members. Provide training to practice messaging so they feel comfortable engaging with patients in promoting cancer prevention vaccination. Since some may be confused between oral cancer, which is generally not prevented by the vaccine, & oropharyngeal cancer, make a point to clarify this distinction. By creating a workplace environment where every patient, guardian, and grandparent receives the HPV vaccination recommendation, oral health practitioners can reduce the HPV cancer burden.

Visit <https://hpvroundtable.org/> to download Dental Health Care Provider Action Guide and other valuable resources. Visit www.isds.org and click on "Communications" and "Oral Cancer Awareness" to learn more.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/hus/2019/038-508.pdf>