

Pharmacists: Let's Talk About the HPV Vaccine



Let's Talk about HPV

What is HPV?

The Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a viral infection that is virtually everywhere in America. HPV is a very common infection; it is estimated that the majority of men and women will get the virus at some point in their lives. Over 14 million people in the United States will become newly infected with HPV this year alone.

What health problems are associated with HPV?

The two most common HPV-associated health issues are cancer and warts. Typically, the type of associated health issues presents in patients depend on the strain of the virus that infects the host. Out of the more than 40 HPV types that can infect the genital tract, there are four types that are the most concerning. HPV types 6 and 11 are to blame in about 90% of genital warts cases worldwide, while types 16 and 18 are responsible for more than 70% of cervical cancers. Arkansas has one of the highest incidences of cervical cancer in the United States.

Cervical cancer is the most prevalent cancer to arise from HPV for women and throat cancer is the most prevalent cancer to arise from HPV for men. HPV can also cause cancers of the vagina, vulva, penis, anus, and even the back of the throat.

How is HPV spread?

HPV is spread through intimate skin-to-skin contact, most commonly by intercourse or genital skin-to-skin contact, but also by oral sex and other intimate contact. Almost every person who is sexually active will get HPV at some time in their life if they don't get the vaccine.

Because HPV is virulent, it is easily spread and typically presents with no symptoms. However, not all HPV infections are harmful or even symptomatic in patients. The body's immune system naturally clears HPV in about 2 years in 90% of cases, but persistent infection by certain types of the virus can lead to serious problems such as genital warts or certain types of cancers.

Why is this important to pharmacists?

There is a vaccine that can prevent HPV-induced cancer and it works extremely well. HPV vaccine has the potential to prevent more than 90% of HPV-attributable cancers. With authority granted by the Arkansas State Board of Pharmacy, Arkansas pharmacists may offer vaccines to children, adolescents, and adults.

Let's Talk about the HPV Vaccine!

Who is recommended to get the HPV vaccine?

In June 2019, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released an updated HPV vaccination schedule via their Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR). The HPV vaccination schedule update was guided by ACIP. In October 2018, using results from 4vHPV clinical trials in women aged 24 through 45 years, and bridging immunogenicity and safety data in women and men, the Food and Drug Administration expanded the approved age range for 9vHPV use from 9 through 26 years to 9 through 45 years in women and men. In July 2020, the FDA added oropharyngeal cancer prevention as an indication for the HPV vaccine.

HPV vaccination is recommended for all persons through 26 years of age. This is considered a routine vaccination. Patients who are ages 27 – 45 years may receive the vaccine, based on shared clinical decision-making with a provider.

The schedule for persons aged 9 through 14 years:

- It is recommended the HPV vaccine series be initiated at 11 or 12 years of age, but can be given as early as 9 years of age.
- For patients initiating the vaccine series before the age of 15 years, it is recommended they receive 2 doses of the HPV vaccine, with the second dose received 6 – 12 months after the initial dose.

The schedule for children and adults aged 15 through 26 years:

- Patients age 15 – 26 years of age and special patient populations are recommended to receive 3 doses of the HPV vaccine.
- For all patients initiating the vaccine series after the age of 15 years old, they are recommended to receive 3 doses of the HPV vaccine, with the second dose received 1 – 2 months after the initial dose, and the third dose 6 months after the initial dose.
- Catch-up HPV vaccination is recommended for all persons through age 26 years who are not adequately vaccinated.

Adults aged >26 years:

- HPV vaccination is routinely recommended for adults aged 27 – 45 years of age. Instead, a shared clinical decision should be made with the patient on whether HPV vaccination is appropriate due to possible benefit to some populations. The HPV vaccine is not licensed for use in adults over aged >45.
- **Special populations and medical conditions.** These recommendations for children and adults aged 9 through 26 years and for adults aged >26 years apply to all persons, regardless of behavioral or medical risk factors for HPV infection or disease. For persons who are pregnant, HPV vaccination should be delayed until after pregnancy; however, pregnancy testing is not needed before vaccination. Persons who are breastfeeding or lactating can receive HPV vaccine. Recommendations regarding HPV vaccination during pregnancy or lactation have not changed. For information on vaccination for immunocompromised and special needs populations, view the CDC Adult Immunization Schedule.
- For the most current recommendations on the HPV vaccine go to: <https://www.aap.org/en/patient-care/immunizations/vaccination-recommendations-by-the-aap/?srsltid=AfmBOoqKc-Bltwk9hdX7a6qK9cbL0K8rHS1vxNMng1-QgAEmCxL6nWXV>

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Who is not recommended to get the HPV vaccine?

- Anyone who has had a severe allergic reaction to a previous dose of the vaccine.
- Anyone who has a life-threatening allergy to any ingredient in the vaccine.
- Patients who are pregnant.
- Patients who have a severe allergy to yeast.

Is the vaccine safe?

Yes, the CDC and FDA have reviewed the safety information for the HPV vaccine, and it has been shown to be safe.

Does the vaccine have side effects?

The most common side effects of the HPV vaccine are:

- Pain, redness, or swelling in the arm where the shot was given
- Fever
- Headache or feeling tired
- Fainting after a shot is common in some teenagers, but it can happen to adults, too. To minimize fainting risk, have patients sit down for 15 minutes after the getting the HPV vaccine.

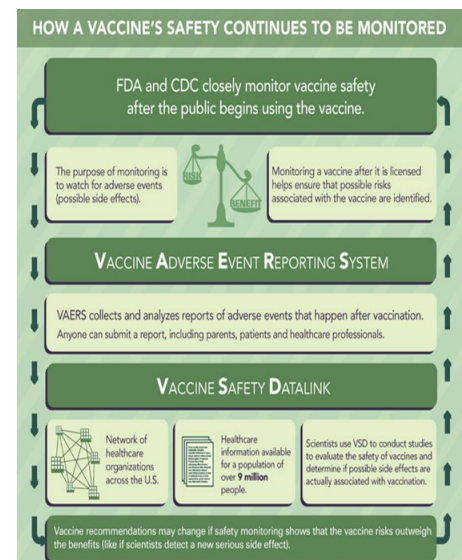
If you, as a provider, encounter any uncommon side effects, report them to the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS). For more information on the VAERS visit <https://vaers.hhs.gov/index>.

Reminder: Always give patients or parents of the patient the most current edition of the CDC Vaccine Information Sheet (VIS). All VISs can be found on the CDC website.

Helpful information for pharmacists about the HPV vaccine:

- Duration of vaccine protection - it is suspected that immunity to HPV after receiving the vaccine is lifelong for both the 2 and 3-dose series.
- If the patient's vaccination series was interrupted, the series does not need to be restarted. The number of their total doses depends on the age of their initial dose of the series.

The HPV vaccine is one of twelve vaccines covered under the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program (National VICP). For more information visit <https://www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation/>



How can Arkansas Pharmacists offer the HPV Vaccine?

Pharmacist Roles:

Pharmacists can better coordinate care by communicating information on vaccines administered in pharmacies outside the primary care clinic setting (pediatrician, family physician, nurse practitioner, physician assistant) to the patient's primary care provider. At a minimum the vaccine name, dose, route and date of administration should be relayed. The pharmacist and pharmacy team should inquire about the date of their most recent well-child visit should screen adolescents and children while obtaining the patient history. Patients without a primary care provider should be assisted with identifying one and scheduling a visit. For adolescents and children who are eligible for HPV vaccination, well-child visits should be completed annually. Pharmacists should educate, counsel, and consider formalized referrals to assist patients and parents with scheduling well-child visits that are overdue. For patients 21 and over, pharmacists should educate and refer women to their PCP to get needed cervical cancer screening (pap test/pap smear).

Current Pharmacist Immunization Requirements for HPV Vaccinations

Arkansas pharmacists have the authority to prescribe immunizations. Pharmacist can delegate vaccine administration to appropriately trained pharmacy technicians.

- Pharmacists can prescribe and administer all CDC recommended vaccines to patients 7 and older. Pharmacies no longer need an immunization protocol with a physician to administer vaccines.
 - As an Arkansas pharmacist, you now have full authority to prescribe and administer vaccines.
 - Pharmacists are the prescriber for vaccines they administer. Each pharmacist needs their own National Provider Identifier (NPI) number.
 - Arkansas Medicaid now recognizes pharmacists as providers.

Please refer to the Arkansas State Board of Pharmacy for the most up-to-date pharmacy immunization requirements: <https://www.pharmacyboard.arkansas.gov/>

Immunization Coverage in Arkansas Pharmacies by Selected Health Plans

Diagnosis and billing codes:

- Billing CPT Code: 90651 (Gardasil® 9)
- ICD 10 Code: Z23 for all vaccination diagnoses

Health plans and expected HPV vaccine coverage in pharmacies*:

- **State Employees and Public School Teachers:** HPV coverage in pharmacies
- **Arkansas Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) private plans:** expected coverage in pharmacies for most plans
- **Arkansas Health Exchange Plans including Arkansas Works (Ambetter of Arkansas, Arkansas BCBS, QualChoice Arkansas):** expected coverage in pharmacies for most plans
- **Medicare part B** (very few eligible patients are age 45 or younger): HPV vaccine is not covered
- **Medicare part D** (very few eligible patients are age 45 or younger): HPV vaccine is usually not covered
- **Medicare Advantage** (very few eligible patients are age 45 or younger): HPV vaccine is usually not covered
- **Arkansas Medicaid age 19 and over:** HPV vaccine may be covered
- **Arkansas Medicaid Age 7 to 18:** Coverage of HPV vaccine is through the Arkansas Medicaid and Arkansas Department of Health Vaccine for Children (VFC) Program or ARKids-B SCHIP Vaccine program.

***These are not a guarantee of payment and are subject to change – check plans prior to administering the HPV vaccine.**

What is the Vaccines for Children program?

VFC Background:

The purpose of the Vaccines for Children (VFC) program is to improve vaccine availability by providing ACIP recommended vaccines at no cost to eligible children who might not otherwise be vaccinated due to an inability to pay.

Children are eligible to receive free vaccines through the VFC program if they are Medicaid-eligible, uninsured, underinsured (insurance does not cover the cost of immunizations), or American Indian or Alaskan Native ethnicity. In Arkansas, the program is administered by the Arkansas Department of Health (ADH). The ADH distributes vaccine and provides technical support for best practices and workflows to eligible VFC providers. Arkansas Medicaid provides reimbursement opportunities to eligible VFC and ARKids-B SCHIP providers for vaccine administration.

VFC vaccine reimbursement:

The Arkansas Medicaid Program will reimburse pharmacies the administration fee for selected vaccines that are obtained through VFC or ARKids-B SCHIP Vaccine program. Providers may not bill for the cost of the VFC vaccine – this could be considered fraud and abuse. The vaccine administration fee is per vaccine and providers must accept the reimbursement for immunization administration set by the state Medicaid agency or the contracted Medicaid health plans for Medicaid VFC-eligible children.

For more information on billing information, refer to section 292.950 of the Physician manual for VFC vaccines billing procedures and section 262.430 for ARKids-B SCHIP vaccine. All Arkansas State Board of Pharmacy laws and regulations will apply.

For additional content on the Arkansas VFC program, visit:

<https://www.immunizear.org/vaccines-for-children>

VFC Eligibility

VFC eligibility:

To be eligible for participation, the pharmacy must meet the requirements of the Vaccines for Children Program. To view eligibility and enrollment requirements, please refer to the WebIZ Home Page.

For Billing/Reimbursement Information:

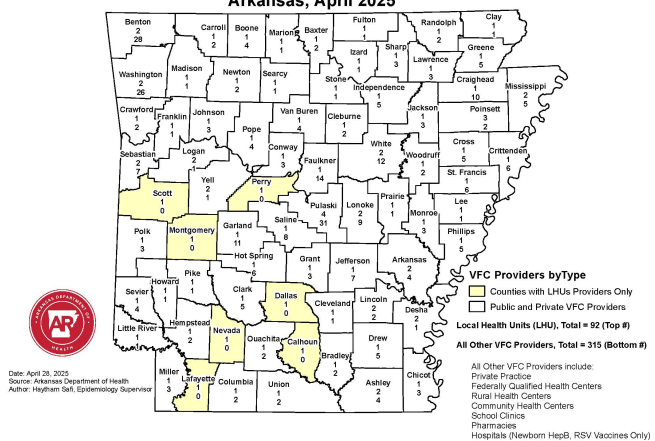
Refer to <https://medicaid.mmis.arkansas.gov/Provider/Docs/fees.aspx> . Click on Provider / Provider Manuals / Physician to access the online Arkansas Provider Manuals and fee schedules.

Currently, the immunization administration fees for VFC and ARKids-B SCHIP are covered and billed as EP/TJ modifier codes at a rate of \$13.14 administration fee per vaccine.

Why should you enroll to be a VFC provider?

There are currently 7 counties in Arkansas that do not have VFC providers outside of ADH local health units. Pharmacists have the potential to fill in gaps in immunization coverage in those counties and improve immunization rates in Arkansas – specifically by providing strong recommendations for appropriate ACIP vaccines.

Vaccines for Children (VFC) Immunization Providers by County
Arkansas, April 2025



Arkansas' Immunization Information System - WebIZ

Arkansas WebIZ

The Arkansas WebIZ system is the statewide immunization registry and is administered by the Arkansas Department of Health. The mission of the Arkansas Immunization Information System and registry is to utilize information management technology as the basis for an information system capable of improving Arkansans' immunization documentation and increasing the immunization rates of Arkansans, in order to prevent and/or reduce the morbidity and mortality from vaccine preventable disease.

Arkansas state law **REQUIRES** that all immunizations administered to patients 21 years of age and younger must be reported to the state's immunization registry WebIZ. If you were to enroll as a VFC vaccine provider, inputting vaccine data into WebIZ would be required. Despite the law, it is best practice to report all immunizations for all ages into the state's immunization registry WebIZ. For example, those pharmacists who collaborate with Dr. Jennifer Dillaha at the Arkansas Department of Health and her immunization protocol are required to report all vaccines into WebIZ regardless of age. In addition, Arkansas CPESN (Community Pharmacy Enhanced Services Network) has a requirement in their participation agreement to report all vaccines to WebIZ for all ages. This best practice will ensure better care coordination with immunizations for Arkansans.

ImmunizeAR Working for You!

Arkansas Immunization Action Coalition (ImmunizeAR)

The intent for pharmacist involvement in the delivery of the HPV vaccine is to increase successful completion of the two or 3-dose series, as pharmacists are more accessible to patients, especially in rural Arkansas. Adolescents aged 11 to 18 typically receive one well-child visit per year at the doctor, making administration of doses number two and three according to the immunization schedule challenging to provide for some pediatric or family practice clinic settings.

ImmunizeAR is exploring options with the Arkansas Department of Health and other adolescent immunization stakeholders to help remedy that so that pharmacists can collaborate with physicians and other prescribers in their area to give the second or third dose of the series.

For more information on ImmunizeAR and resources for the HPV vaccine visit <http://www.immunizear.org> . ImmunizeAR is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving vaccination rates for all Arkansans through education, advocacy, and statewide partnerships.

References and Resources:

Meites E, Szilagyi PG, Chesson HW, Unger ER, Romero JR, Markowitz LE. Human Papillomavirus Vaccination for Adults: Updated Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2019;68:698–702. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6832a3>
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<http://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/2016-health-of-women-and-children-report/measure/Immunize HPVmale MCH/state/AR>.

<https://www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/current-vis.html>

<http://www.immunizear.com/vfc>



Questions about the HPV vaccine?

For more information:

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