



CANADIAN
PUBLIC HEALTH
ASSOCIATION

ASSOCIATION
CANADIENNE DE
SANTÉ PUBLIQUE

UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH

Searching for the answers: Parents Want Clear Facts About HPV Vaccination

Mylène Tantchou Dipankui¹, Benjamin Giguère¹, Kieran C. O'Doherty¹,
Antonella Pucci²

¹University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario, ²Canadian Public Health Association, Ottawa, Ontario

Survey report | January 2025

Search

Is the HPV vaccine |





CANADIAN
PUBLIC HEALTH
ASSOCIATION

ASSOCIATION
CANADIENNE DE
SANTÉ PUBLIQUE

UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH

THE VOICE OF PUBLIC HEALTH

The Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) is the independent national voice and trusted advocate for public health, speaking up for people and populations to all levels of government.

We champion health equity, social justice and evidence-informed decision-making. We leverage knowledge, identify and address emerging public health issues, and connect diverse communities of practice. We promote the public health perspective and evidence to government leaders and policy-makers. We are a catalyst for change that improves health and well-being for all.

We support the passion, knowledge and perspectives of our diverse membership through collaboration, wide-ranging discussions and information sharing.

We inspire organizations and governments to implement a range of public health policies and programs that improve health outcomes for populations in need.

OUR VISION

Healthy people and communities thriving in inclusive, equitable, sustainable environments

OUR MISSION

To enhance the health of all people and communities in Canada, particularly those who are structurally disadvantaged, and to contribute to a healthier and more equitable world.

For more information, contact:

Canadian Public Health Association

404-1525 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1Z 8R9 Canada

T: 613-725-3769 | info@cpha.ca | cpha.ca



CANADIAN
PUBLIC HEALTH
ASSOCIATION

ASSOCIATION
CANADIENNE DE
SANTÉ PUBLIQUE

UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH

Authors' Statements

We would like to acknowledge the authors, Mylène Tantchou Dipankui, Benjamin Giguère, Kieran C. O'Doherty, and Antonella Pucci for the following contributions in the development of this report.

- Mylène Tantchou Dipankui (MTD) is recognized as the primary researcher and writer of the report responsible for conceptualizing the project, determining the methodology, conducting data analysis, and revising the final publication.
- Benjamin Giguère (BG) is recognized for his supervision of the project, as well as for his contributions to the conceptualization, methodology, data analysis, validation, visualization, editing, and revision of the report.
- Kieran C. O'Doherty (KO) is recognized for his funding acquisition and supervision of the project, as well as for his contributions to the conceptualization, methodology, data analysis, editing, and revisions of the report.
- Antonella Pucci (AP) is recognized for her funding acquisition and her contributions in writing, reviewing, editing, and graphic design for the final report.

Please direct all future correspondence and inquiries regarding to the report to:
mtantcho@uoguelph.ca

Acknowledgements

We appreciate Lucie Marisa Bucci, Danielle Macpherson, Ruotian Xu, and Emma Mallach for their contributions to the data collection process. Additionally, we would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to the parents who took the time to complete our survey and provide us with valuable insights, especially during the challenging times of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic.

This project was funded by an unrestricted educational grant through Merck Canada Inc. The report was supported by Mitacs, the Canadian Public Health Association and the University of Guelph.



CANADIAN
PUBLIC HEALTH
ASSOCIATION

ASSOCIATION
CANADIENNE DE
SANTÉ PUBLIQUE

UNIVERSITY
of
GUELPH

Introduction

When making decisions about vaccinating their children against human papillomavirus (HPV), parents seek reliable information from trusted sources. Our research reveals that healthcare providers remain the most influential voices, while visual formats like infographics prove most effective for explaining vaccine safety and benefits.



This finding comes at a critical time. The COVID-19 pandemic severely disrupted school-based HPV vaccination programs across Canada. In Ontario, vaccination rates for 12-year-old students dropped to just 3% in 2020-21, though they have since begun recovering — reaching 47.8% by 2022-23. However, these rates remain well below the pre-pandemic national average of 56%.

This matters because HPV affects approximately 550,000 Canadians annually, with nearly 80% of females being infected at some point in their lives. While most infections resolve on their own, HPV can cause several types of cancer. Cervical cancer alone is diagnosed in more than 1,300 Canadians each year and claims over 400 lives.

Our research team at the University of Guelph, working with the Canadian Public Health Association, surveyed 554 parents of children aged 9-15 years across nine provinces and two territories. We wanted to understand how parents make decisions about HPV vaccination and what information they need to make informed choices.



Trust in Healthcare Providers Remains Strong

Despite the growing influence of social media, parents predominantly turn to healthcare providers when making vaccination decisions. Among survey respondents who specified their other information sources, 17.5% identified healthcare provider recommendations as their primary trusted source.



Social media platforms do play a role, with Facebook being the most commonly used (23.3% of parents), followed by Reddit (7.8%) and X (formerly Twitter) (5.8%). However, parents often use these platforms as starting points for gathering information rather than as definitive sources (Refer to [Table 1](#) in the Appendix).

Visual Communication Proves Most Effective



When asked about their preferred format for receiving vaccination information, parents showed a clear preference for visual presentations. Infographics emerged as the most effective format, with 20.8% of parents rating them as their top choice. This was followed by narratives or personal stories (12.1%) and video content (9.0%) (Refer to [Table 2](#) in the Appendix).

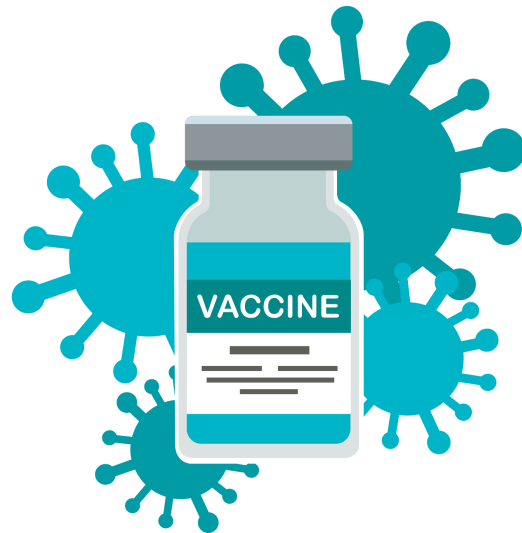


This preference for infographics suggests that complex medical information becomes more accessible when presented visually, allowing parents to grasp key concepts and statistics more easily. The success of infographics likely stems from their ability to present complex information in a clear, organized manner.

Safety Concerns Drive Information Needs

Our research identified specific information that parents seek when making vaccination decisions. Vaccine safety emerged as the primary concern, with parents particularly interested in understanding potential side effects. Parents also want clear information about:

- the outcomes of HPV infection, particularly cancer risks
- the likelihood of HPV infection
- how vaccines are tested and monitored for safety
- who regulates vaccine safety
- the vaccination schedule and timing



(Refer to [Table 3](#) in the Appendix).



Implications for Public Health Communication

These findings suggest several ways to improve HPV vaccination programs and communication strategies.



First, healthcare providers need ongoing support and resources to effectively address parents' concerns. This includes staying current with vaccine safety data and developing skills to communicate this information clearly.



Second, public health organizations should prioritize creating high-quality infographics that address parents' key concerns about vaccine safety and effectiveness. These visual materials should present complex information in an accessible format while maintaining scientific accuracy.



Third, while social media platforms can help disseminate information, they should direct parents to reliable sources and healthcare providers for definitive guidance. This approach acknowledges social media's role in information sharing while steering parents toward trusted sources.



CANADIAN
PUBLIC HEALTH
ASSOCIATION

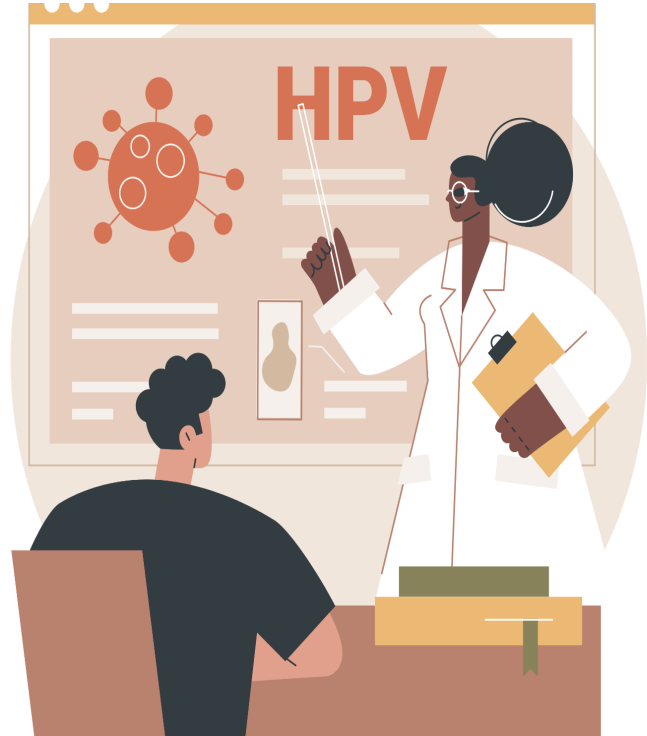
ASSOCIATION
CANADIENNE DE
SANTÉ PUBLIQUE

UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH

Moving Forward Post-Pandemic

The disruption of vaccination programs during the COVID-19 pandemic created new challenges — but also revealed opportunities to reimagine how we communicate about vaccines. Our research suggests that recovery efforts should focus on:

- supporting healthcare providers in delivering clear, confident vaccine recommendations
- developing visually engaging materials that address parents' safety concerns
- creating accessible pathways for catch-up vaccination
- building trust through transparent communication about vaccine safety and monitoring



By understanding and responding to parents' information needs, we can better support them in making informed decisions about HPV vaccination. This approach promises to help protect more young Canadians from HPV-related cancers while respecting parents' need for clear, reliable information from sources they trust.



Appendix

Table 1: Frequency table of social media and other sources the participants relied on to obtain credible information about HPV vaccines and vaccination

Social media source	N ¹	Percent
Other	138	24.9
Facebook	129	23.3
Reddit	43	7.8
Twitter	32	5.8
Pinterest	15	2.7
Instagram	5	0.9
Total	362	65.3
Missing	192	34.7
Total	554	100.0

¹ Number of participants ranking the format first



Table 2: Frequency table of the promotional formats used to provide HPV vaccination information, in order from most likely (1) to least likely (5) to influence decision-making

Promotional Formats	N ¹	Percent	Valid Percent*
Infographics	115	20.8	34.1
Others	86	15.5	25.5
Narratives/stories	67	12.1	19.9
Videos	50	9.0	14.8
Images	19	3.4	5.6
Total	337	60.8	100.0
Missing	217	39.2	
Total	554	100.0	

¹ Number of participants ranking the format first

*Percentage after we disregard missing responses.



Table 3: Information that parents looked for in order to make their decision about HPV vaccination

Information parents looked for in order to make their decision about HPV vaccination	N ²
What are the side effects of HPV vaccines	359
HPV infection outcomes (e.g., cancer)	263
Chances of getting HPV infection	233
How are HPV vaccines tested	203
Who regulates HPV vaccine safety	190
Who monitors HPV vaccine safety	185
Is it safe to get more than one vaccine at the same time	170
What are HPV vaccine ingredients	169
Can someone get sick from an HPV vaccine	139



Who is providing the vaccine (e.g., doctor, nurse, etc.)	136
Are additives in HPV vaccines safe	135
How is the HPV vaccination schedule tested	104
How to minimize HPV vaccine injection pain and fear	82
Alternative HPV vaccination schedules	61
Other	33
Homeopathic remedies	29
Don't know/Not sure	21

² Number of participants who checked the box



CANADIAN
PUBLIC HEALTH
ASSOCIATION

ASSOCIATION
CANADIENNE DE
SANTÉ PUBLIQUE

UNIVERSITY
of GUELPH

The Canadian Public Health Association
is the independent national voice and
trusted advocate for public health, speaking
up for people and populations to all levels of
government.

For more information, contact:

Canadian Public Health Association

404-1525 Carling Avenue, Ottawa, ON K1Z 8R9

T: 613-725-3769 | info@cpha.ca

www.cpha.ca