

CANCER WON'T WAIT: HPV PREVENTION WEEK (OCT 5-11) EMPOWERS CANADIANS TO HELP ELIMINATE CERTAIN KINDS OF HPV-RELATED CANCERS

Ottawa, October 5 – Two leading health organizations are calling on Canadians to help move towards the goal of eliminating certain cancers caused by the Human Papillomavirus (HPV), as the fourth annual HPV Prevention Week (October 5th – 11th) gets underway.

The Federation of Medical Women of Canada (FMWC) and the Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada (SOGC) say it's within Canada's grasp to actually eliminate cervical cancers, and to reduce the risk of some other HPV-related cancers, if we all take steps to help protect ourselves, our families and friends from HPV infection.

"We have the potential to eliminate cervical cancers and reduce the risk of some other HPV-related cancers in Canada, if we all do what we can to help prevent HPV infection," said Dr. Vivien Brown, past President of the FMWC, and Chair & Co-Founder of HPV Prevention Week in Canada. "We are proud of the educational efforts and awareness activities we are highlighting this week, in partnership with the SOGC."

It is estimated that three out of every four sexually active Canadians will contract HPV at some point in their lives.ⁱ HPV is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI).ⁱⁱ It is responsible for genital warts, and almost all cases of cervical cancer, but it can also lead to anal cancer, vaginal, and vulvar cancers, penile cancers and mouth and throat cancers.ⁱⁱⁱ Anyone who has had sex is at risk for HPV. Since not all infections have symptoms or noticeable symptoms, you often cannot tell if you are carrying HPV.^{iv}

"Canadians need to know that we already have a range of protective measures available to us to help prevent some of the cancers HPV infection can cause," said Dr. Jennifer Blake, Chief Executive Officer of the SOGC. "School vaccination programs may have been disrupted by COVID-19 closures, and many women have been unable to schedule check-ups and PAP tests with their doctors, but cancer won't wait. We all need to take action to help stop the spread of HPV."

Canadians are being encouraged to take the following steps to help protect themselves against HPV and certain HPV-related cancers:

- Learn about STIs, including their signs, symptoms, consequences, and methods of transmission.^v
- Learn about safer sex methods and use them consistently. Correctly and consistently using a condom during sex may reduce your risk of getting HPV, as well as preventing other STIs. However, remember that the areas of skin not covered by the condom are not protected.^{vi}
- Make informed decisions about your sexual health. Talk to your partner(s) about their STI status and the use of protection. Remember that the previous sexual behaviours of your partner are also a risk for you, especially if they have had multiple partners.^{vii}
- Ask your doctor, nurse or pharmacist about HPV vaccination for you and your family members – vaccines are available in Canada, to help prevent infections from various types of HPV. If you were not immunized against HPV in school, it may not be too late.
- If you are a male who has sex with men, you are at higher risk of HPV infection, and should consider vaccination against HPV.^{viii}
- If you are sexually active, talk to your doctor about HPV prevention. Remember that most sexually active people will get at least one HPV infection in their lifetime. Most people with a healthy immune system will eventually clear the infection from their bodies, but for some others, it can go on to cause genital warts or cancer.^{ix} The best strategy is prevention.

In 2017, Canada became the first country in the world to dedicate an annual week to raising awareness about ways to help protect against HPV infection. The founding partners of HPV Prevention Week are FMWC, SOGC and Merck Canada Inc., whose support continues to make HPV Prevention Week possible.

Among the HPV Prevention Week initiatives taking place across Canada:

From Monday October 5th to Friday October 9th, FMWC will host a series of FREE live online webinars. Attendees can hear talks from leading researchers and health care professionals on a variety of HPV-related topics including self-testing, treating HPV in vulnerable populations and the state of HPV research. For details, including a full webinar schedule, or to register, visit <https://fmwc.ca/hpv-prevention-week>.

On Thursday, October 8th, SOGC will host a Facebook Live Event, *Elimination Through Vaccination*. The live discussion will feature SOGC CEO Dr. Jennifer Blake, Dr. Nancy Durand, a gynecologist at Toronto's Sunnybrook Health Science Centre, and Danielle Michaud, a cervical cancer survivor and SportsNet Anchor. For more information, visit SOGC's Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/sogc.org/>.

A number of buildings, monuments and natural attractions across Canada will be illuminated to promote HPV Prevention Week and get people talking about HPV prevention, including Niagara Falls, CN Tower, Calgary Tower, High Level Bridge and BC Place, to name just a few. For the full list of participating locations, visit HPVinfo.ca.

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FMWC

The Federation of Medical Women of Canada (FMWC) is a national organization committed to the professional, social and personal advancement of women physicians and to the promotion of the well-being of women both in the medical profession and in society at large. Established in 1924, the FMWC is also an independent nation member of the Medical Women's International Association. For more information, please visit: www.fmwcc.ca

About SOGC

SOGC is one of Canada's oldest national specialty organizations. Established in 1944, the Society's mission is to promote excellence in the practice of obstetrics and gynaecology and to advance the health of women through leadership, advocacy, collaboration and education. The SOGC has grown to over 4,000 members, comprised of obstetricians, gynaecologists, family physicians, nurses, midwives, and allied health professionals working in the field of women's sexual and reproductive health. For more information, please visit www.sogc.org.

For further information or to arrange interviews with Dr. Brown or Dr. Blake, contact:

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ⁱ Government of Canada. 2017. Human Papillomavirus (HPV). Available online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/human-papillomavirus-hpv.html> (accessed September 2020)

ⁱⁱ Government of Canada. 2017. Human Papillomavirus (HPV). Available online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/human-papillomavirus-hpv.html> (accessed September 2020)

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^{ix} Government of Canada. 2017. Human Papillomavirus (HPV). Available online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/human-papillomavirus-hpv.html> (accessed September 2020)