

# A Pharmacist's Guide to Initiating Discussions about HPV Prevention Against Head and Neck Cancers

HPV infections are commonly associated with causing cancers related to the genital areas, including cervical, vulvar, vaginal and anal cancers, but it can also cause head and neck cancers.<sup>i</sup> The focus of this tool will be on Gardasil 9 and its use to prevent head and neck cancers as it is currently the only HPV vaccine in Canada approved (with conditions) for this indication.<sup>ii,iii</sup> For general information about all HPV vaccines and their approved indications, please refer to the [HPV chapter](#) of the Canadian Immunization Guide.<sup>^</sup>


## Gardasil 9 – Prevention of Diseases<sup>ii</sup>

For individuals 9–45 years of age <sup>^</sup>	HPV-types	♀	♂
Cervical cancers	16, 18, 31, 33, 45, 52, and 58	✓	✗
Vulvar cancers		✓	✗
Vaginal cancers		✓	✗
Anal cancers		✓	✓
Oropharyngeal cancers <sup>-</sup>		✓	✓
Head and neck cancers (others) <sup>-</sup>		✓	✓
Genital warts	6 and 11	✓	✓


Gardasil 9 also provides prevention against some precancerous or dysplastic lesions associated with the above HPV types

## Strategies to Identify Appropriate Patients


**FLAG**  
prescription  
bags




**ASK**  
during prescription  
drop-off, pick-up  
or counselling




**DISCUSS**  
during  
medication  
reviews




**DISPLAY**  
educational  
materials




**SEARCH**  
the pharmacy  
database



**HOLD**  
vaccine-  
themed days



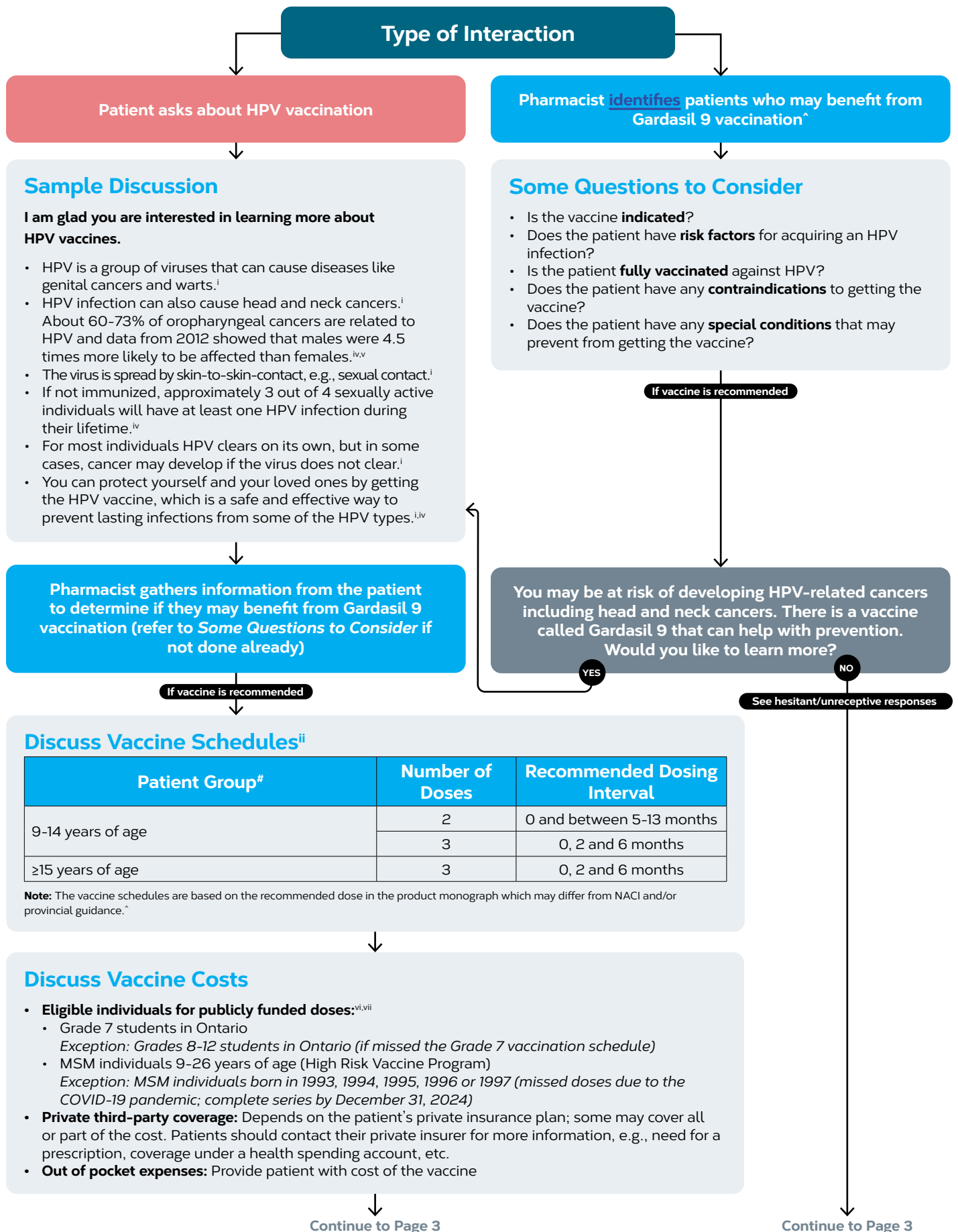
**OFFER**  
to patients  
receiving other  
vaccines

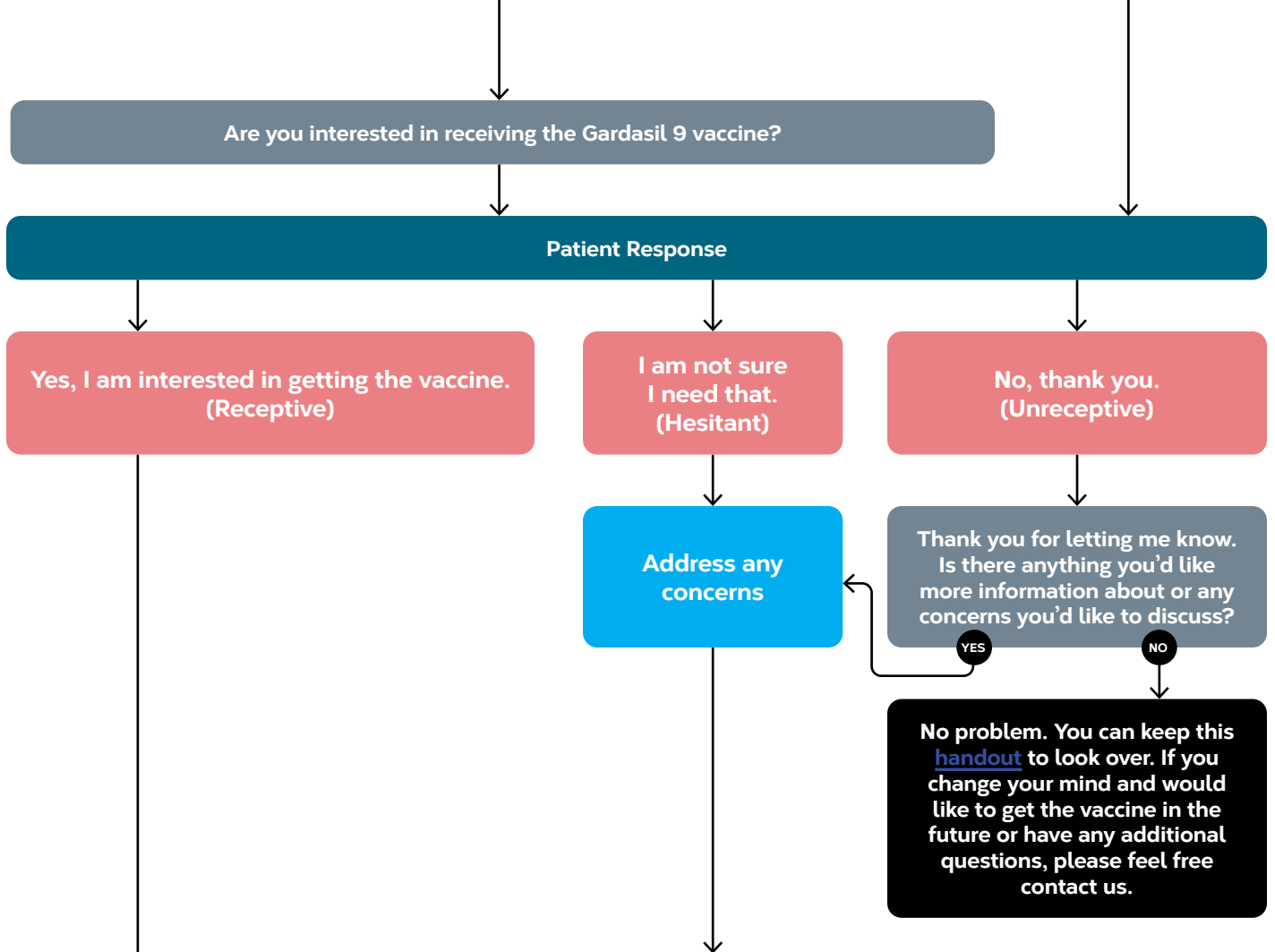


**Engage Your Pharmacy Team and Delegate Tasks**

NOTE: Gardasil 9 is a Schedule II vaccine, i.e., a pharmacist can make a recommendation and a prescription is not required

## Sample Discussion Guide





## Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: How does Gardasil 9 work?<sup>ii</sup>**

**A:** Gardasil 9 is a non-live vaccine that triggers the body's immune system to produce antibodies against the virus to help prevent infections and related diseases caused by 9 types of HPV.

**Q: Is Gardasil 9 safe?<sup>viii</sup>**

**A:** Yes. Vaccines are tested and licensed in Canada before they are given to the public. Additionally, information about side effects is continuously collected to monitor safety. (See the *Sample Counselling Script* for a list of common side effects.)

**Q: If I already have/had HPV, do I still need to be vaccinated?<sup>iv</sup>**

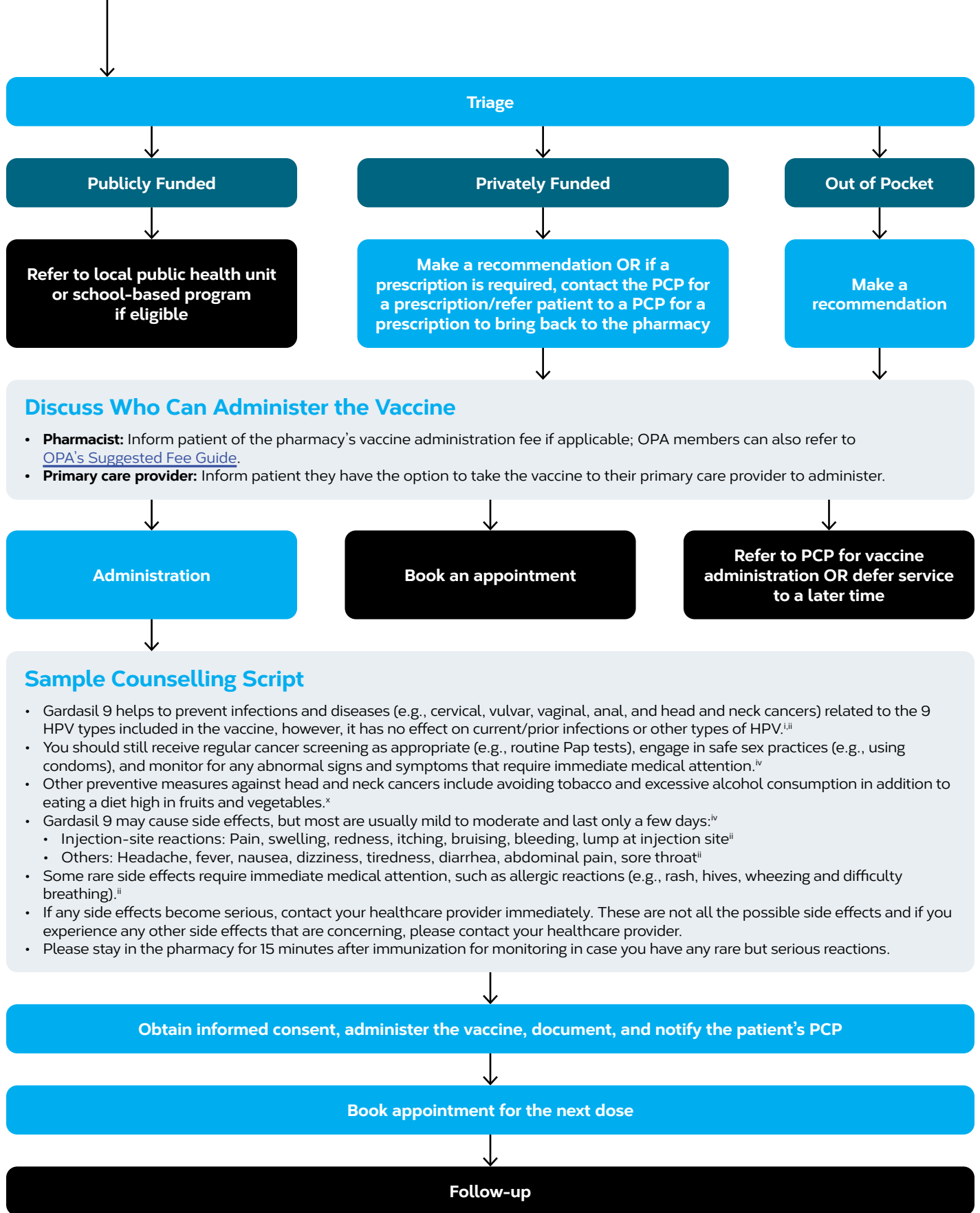
**A:** Gardasil 9 cannot treat existing HPV infections or disease, however, even if you have been infected by one or more HPV types, Gardasil 9 can still help protect you against the other types contained in the vaccine that you have not been exposed to yet.

**Q: If I am already sexually active, do I still need to be vaccinated?<sup>iv,ix</sup>**

**A:** Although the vaccine works best if used prior to onset of sexual activity and exposure to HPV, vaccination is still beneficial after the onset of sexual activity as it is very unlikely that you are/ have been infected with all the HPV types in the vaccine. Even people in long-term monogamous relationships can still get HPV since the virus can remain dormant for years. The vaccine does not have any effect on pre-existing HPV infections, including those caused by HPV types in the vaccine, however, Gardasil 9 can still help protect you against the other HPV types contained in the vaccine that you have not been exposed to yet.

**Q: Is Gardasil 9 the only vaccine available for HPV prevention?<sup>iv</sup>**

**A:** No. In Canada there are two available HPV vaccines, Gardasil 9 and Cervarix, however, NACI recommends use of Gardasil 9 since it protects against a greater number of HPV types and associated diseases.<sup>^</sup>



<sup>^</sup> The Canadian Immunization Guide chapter on [HPV vaccines](#) was updated on July 24, 2024 with new recommendations. These may not all be reflected in this tool. Information on any updates to provincial guidance were not yet available at the time of publication of this tool.

<sup>-</sup> Approved (with conditions) pending additional studies to verify the vaccine's clinical benefit

<sup>#</sup> Immunocompetent, non-HIV infected

HPV: human papillomavirus; MSM: men who have sex with men; NACI: National Advisory Committee on Immunization; PCP: primary care provider

## DISCLAIMER

This tool was developed by the Ontario Pharmacists Association (OPA) with a grant provided by Merck Canada. The information provided in this document is intended to assist pharmacists with initiating discussions with patients about Gardasil 9 for the prevention of head and neck cancers but is not meant to be comprehensive and does not replace professional judgement and responsibilities. It is provided without warranty of any kind by OPA and OPA assumes no responsibility for any errors, omissions or inaccuracies therein. The decision for use and application of this document is the responsibility of the user. OPA assumes no liability for such use and application or any resulting outcomes. It is the responsibility of the pharmacy professional to use professional judgment in evaluating this material in light of any relevant clinical or situational data. It is intended to supplement materials provided by regulatory authorities, and should there be any discrepancies, municipal, provincial, and federal laws, policies and guidelines shall prevail. The information provided in this document are current at the time of publication. Pharmacy professionals are encouraged to confirm information with additional resources.

## REFERENCES

- <sup>i</sup> Canadian Cancer Society. Human papillomavirus. Accessed June 18, 2024. <https://cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/reduce-your-risk/get-vaccinated/human-papillomavirus-hpv>
- <sup>ii</sup> Merck Canada Inc. Gardasil 9 Product Monograph. Health Canada Drug Product Database. Published February 5, 2015. Last Updated May 17, 2024. Accessed June 18, 2024. [https://pdf.hres.ca/dpd\\_pm/00075639.PDF](https://pdf.hres.ca/dpd_pm/00075639.PDF)
- <sup>iii</sup> GlaxoSmithKline Inc. Cervarix Product Monograph. Health Canada Drug Product Database. Published February 3, 2010. Last Updated November 9, 2023. Accessed June 18, 2024. [https://pdf.hres.ca/dpd\\_pm/00073320.PDF](https://pdf.hres.ca/dpd_pm/00073320.PDF)
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- <sup>v</sup> Office of the Chief Dental Officer of Canada. Human papillomavirus and oral health. *Can Commun Dis Rep*. 2020;46(1112):380-383. Published 2020 Nov 5. doi:10.14745/ccdr.v46i1112a03
- <sup>vi</sup> Government of Ontario. Publicly Funded Immunization Schedules for Ontario. Last Updated June 2022. Accessed June 18, 2024. <https://www.ontario.ca/files/2024-01/moh-publicly-funded-immunization-schedule-en-2024-01-23.pdf>
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- <sup>x</sup> Canadian Cancer Society. Reducing your risk for oropharyngeal cancer. Accessed June 18, 2024. <https://cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/cancer-types/oropharyngeal/risks/reducing-your-risk>

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