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## HPV not just a threat to women: mouth and throat cancers rising sharply in men

19 October 2016

TORONTO -

Cancers of the mouth and throat caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV) are rising dramatically among Canadian men and are poised to surpass the rate of cervical cancer in females, according to a special report released today by the Canadian Cancer Society. The report, *Canadian Cancer Statistics 2016*, was produced in partnership with the Public Health Agency of Canada and Statistics Canada.

In 2016, nearly 4,400 Canadians will be diagnosed with an HPV cancer and about 1,200 Canadians will die from an HPV cancer. The incidence of HPV mouth and throat cancers increased a dramatic 56% in males and 17% in females between 1992 and 2012. Mouth and throat cancers now represent about one-third of all HPV cancers in Canada.

The Society is urging Canadians to get the HPV vaccine – a safe and effective way to prevent the cancer-causing infection.

“This report shows us for the first time how many Canadians are being affected by HPV cancers,” says Dr Robert Nuttall, Assistant Director, Health Policy, Canadian Cancer Society. “These cancers are largely preventable through vaccination. In the moment it takes to vaccinate your children, you are helping to protect them from cancer in the future.”

The HPV vaccine is widely available through publicly funded school-based programs. It is offered to girls in all provinces and territories, but to boys in only 6 provinces (Alberta, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, Ontario, PEI and Quebec, but not in BC, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan, or the territories). The Society is calling on the remaining 4 provinces and 3 territories to expand their programs to all boys.

“The more boys and girls that get vaccinated, the more cases of cancer will be prevented. It’s that simple,” says Dr Nuttall.

Today’s report underscores how important it is to take preventive action to stop more cancers before they start. With the country facing a projected 40% increase in the number of cancer cases between 2015 and 2030, it’s essential to reduce cancer risks across the



board, from HPV to tobacco to obesity. It's estimated that almost half of all cancers can be prevented through healthy living and policies that protect the health of Canadians.

### **More about HPV**

Most sexually active people will have an HPV infection at some point during their lifetime, making it the most common sexually transmitted disease in Canada and the world. Most people never even know they have it, as most infections clear within 2 years and cause no physical symptoms. However, some infections are serious and can lead to cancer. There are more than 100 different types of HPV, and around 25 types are known or suspected to cause cancer.

HPV causes:

- all cases of cervical cancers
- 25%–35% of oropharyngeal and oral cavity (mouth and throat) cancers
- 80%–90% of anal cancers
- 40% of vaginal and vulvar cancers
- 40%–50% of penile cancers

While it's been known for decades that HPV causes cervical cancer, many people don't realize that it causes these other types of cancer too, and that it affects males as well as females. This report shows that only 35% of HPV cancers in Canada are cervical.

In fact as many Canadians get an HPV mouth and throat cancer as get cervical cancer. And 1 in 3 HPV cancers occur in males. Two types (HPV16 and HPV18) are responsible for the majority of HPV cancers. These infections can be almost entirely prevented through vaccination.

### **Quotes**

"The word eradicate has never been used in the context of a cancer," says Dr Eduardo Franco, world-renowned HPV expert and chairman of the department of oncology at McGill University's Faculty of Medicine. "But perhaps future historians will write about cervical cancer as a disease that only previous generations of Canadians had. In order to reach this goal, it is imperative that Canadians embrace the new public health advances that are significantly improving cancer control and prevention."



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"We now know that HPV is causing a significant burden of cancer in Canada," says Dr. Heather Bryant, Vice President, Cancer Control at the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer. "Vaccination is effective and we are already seeing benefits in Canada."

### **Patient story**

Will Dove, 51, a web developer in Calgary, had just returned from vacation with his family in Mexico this spring when he began to experience pain and pressure in one ear. The initial diagnosis was an ear infection, but it turned out to be throat cancer caused by an HPV infection.

The self-described "fitness nut" and body builder lost 30 pounds in just 5 weeks while undergoing treatment. "Imagine if we had a vaccine for cancer," says the father of 2 teens. "For HPV cancers, we do. If we vaccinate our kids, we can help make these cancers nothing more than a grim memory."

### **More about HPV vaccinations**

Three HPV vaccines are available in Canada. They are all highly effective in protecting against the HPV types they target, which includes the common high-risk (cancer-causing) types 16 and 18. The vaccines are most effective when administered before the onset of sexual activity when the probability of prior infection is low, which is why publicly funded programs are for school-aged children. In addition, the immune system responds better when vaccination is given at a young age.

Extensive research shows that the vaccines are safe, well tolerated and do not increase the risk of serious adverse events. The most common side effects are soreness, swelling, itching and redness at the injection site and fainting.

While the vaccine is widely available to girls in Canada through school programs, not enough children are getting vaccinated. Coverage rates range from 43% to 91% across the country, and only 2 provinces have coverage rates over 80% (NL and PEI).

The Society urges schools and health professionals to promote the vaccine as a safe and effective cancer prevention strategy, and urges parents to sign the vaccination permission forms that their children bring home from school. The Society is also calling on those provinces and territories that haven't already done so to expand free vaccination programs to boys.

### **General highlights – Canadian Cancer Statistics 2016**

- Cancer continues to be the leading cause of death in Canada, causing 30% of all deaths.



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- An estimated 2 in 5 Canadians are expected to be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetimes. And an estimated 1 in 4 Canadians will die from cancer.
- Over the past 30 years, the death rate for all cancers combined has been declining for males and females.
- There were no significant increases in death rates during the past decade for most types of cancer in men and women, with the exception of uterine cancer in females and liver cancer in both sexes.
- Today, over 60% of Canadians will survive at least 5 years after a cancer diagnosis (adjusted for other causes of death). However, this varies considerably by cancer type.
- An estimated 202,400 new cases of cancer (excluding non-melanoma skin cancer) and 78,800 deaths from cancer are expected to occur in Canada in 2016.
- Rates of the disease are relatively stable for new cases and declining for deaths. However, the number of new cancer cases and cancer deaths continues to rise as the Canadian population grows and ages.
- Four types of cancer – lung, breast, colorectal and prostate – account for 50% of newly diagnosed cancers.
- Lung, colorectal, breast and pancreatic cancer are the most common causes of cancer death, with lung cancer accounting for more than 25% of all cancer deaths.

All rates are age standardized to the 2011 Canadian population.

### **About Canadian Cancer Statistics**

Canadian Cancer Statistics 2016 was prepared through a partnership of the Canadian Cancer Society, the Public Health Agency of Canada, Statistics Canada and provincial and territorial cancer registries.

### **About the Canadian Cancer Society**

The Canadian Cancer Society is a national, community-based organization of volunteers whose mission is to eradicate cancer and enhance the quality of life of people living with cancer. Thanks to our donors and volunteers, the Society has the most impact, against the most cancers, in the most communities in Canada. For more information, visit [cancer.ca](http://cancer.ca) or call our toll-free bilingual Cancer Information Service at 1-888-939-3333 (TTY 1-866-786-3934).