

News Release

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Physicians, health scientists and parents call on Catholic trustees to open doors to HPV vaccine

HPV Canada's invites parents to request in-school vaccinations for children

A group of doctors, health scientists and concerned citizens is asking voters in 8 Alberta school districts and one in Ontario to request that candidates for school trustee election open school doors so that parents may have easy access to HPV vaccination for their children.

“HPV is a common, wide-spread infectious disease in Canada and around the world, causing devastating disease, and even death,” says **Dr. Charlene Lyndon, a Calgary obstetrician and gynecologist**. “My patients come from rural and urban settings and, because of this virus, require colposcopy and painful biopsies. The HPV vaccination could help prevent this. My patients are always happy to hear that vaccination will protect their daughters from suffering HPV disease and treatment.”

The group known as HPV Canada points to medical research demonstrating that HPV vaccination prevents the infection that causes cervical cancer, some anal cancers, as well as cancers of the penis, vagina, mouth and throat.

The national group has spearheaded a campaign to educate school trustees about HPV, asking them to lift the ban on vaccination. They have succeeded in Calgary (November 28, 2012) and Yellowknife (May 15, 2013).

“Since 2008, some elected school trustees in Alberta and Ontario have blocked a cancer-preventing vaccine from being offered at school,” says **Juliet Guichon, PhD, a legal scholar and assistant professor of community health sciences, University of Calgary**. “We are coming forward again today to urge voters to ask school trustees throughout Alberta and Ontario to put children first. Parents are entitled to have publicly-funded vaccines available to their children in publicly-funded schools. The most just, effective and efficient method to deliver vaccines is in school.”

HPV vaccinations began to be offered to Canadian schoolgirls free of charge in 2007.

Even though the Vatican does not ban any vaccine, Catholic Boards in the Ontario Region of Halton and eight Alberta school districts have banned the HPV vaccine:

1. Christ the Redeemer Catholic Separate School Division, (Brooks, Canmore, Drumheller, High River, Okotoks, Strathmore)
2. East Central Francophone Education Region No. 3 (Bonnyville, Cold Lake, St. Paul)
3. Medicine Hat Catholic Board of Education (Bow Island, Medicine Hat)
4. Elk Island Catholic Separate School Board (Camrose, Fort Saskatchewan, Sherwood Park, Vegreville)

5. Holy Spirit School Division (Coaldale, Lethbridge, Picture Butte, Pincher Creek, Taber)
6. Lakeland Roman Catholic Separate Schools (Bonnyville, Cold Lake, Waskatenau)
7. Red Deer Catholic Regional Division (Innisfail, Olds, Red Deer, Rocky Mountain House, Sylvan Lake)
8. St. Thomas Aquinas School District (Beaumont, Drayton Valley, Lacombe, Leduc, Ponoka, Wetaskiwin)
9. Region of Halton Catholic School District (Burlington, Halton Hills, Milton, Oakville)

Publicly funded Catholic school districts in Toronto, Ottawa, Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary and Edmonton have welcomed HPV vaccinations.

"Prevention is the key to avoiding illness whether through healthy eating habits, smoking cessation or vaccination," says **Dr. Doug Myhre, associate dean of rural medicine, University of Calgary**. "For patients from rural and remote communities who have the burden of travel to seek care, clearly prevention is better than treatment."

"When nurses are prevented from offering the HPV vaccine in the schools, parents must telephone to make three appointments and take their children three times to public health clinics," says **Dr. Ian Mitchell, professor of paediatrics and bioethicist, University of Calgary**. "Public health research tells us the most efficient way to supply vaccinations to children is in schools. A mountain of research evidence tells us we can help prevent our children from getting these deadly cancers. That is why we are speaking up again."

"This is a great vaccine," says **Glen Armstrong, professor and head of microbiology, immunology & infectious diseases, University of Calgary**. "It has been proven extremely safe and highly effective in many different clinical trials."

"Girls younger than 15 benefit most from HPV vaccination," says **Eduardo Franco, PhD, James McGill Professor in the departments of oncology and epidemiology & biostatistics at McGill University**. "Many researchers have looked for changes in risk-taking behaviour after vaccination. They found none. There is no research evidence that vaccinating children against HPV causes promiscuity or undermines abstinence teaching. On the existing data, the claim is preposterous," he adds.

"This is about saving lives", says **Dr. Susan Bornemisza, a family practitioner** who usually diagnoses one case of HPV infection in her Calgary practice every day. "I often see boys, girls, teens and young adults. Many have been sexual abused or have experienced date rape. We can help prevent young people from getting HPV-related cancer by offering it in school where parents will find it easier to access," she says.

"With the October 21 school trustee elections, Albertans have the opportunity to request that school trustees act in the health interests of school children," says **Guichon**. "We urge voters to question candidates about the HPV vaccine ban, and to vote for those who support protecting child health."

For more information: visit <http://hugyourkids.org>

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