

**Dental Hygienists, Dental Therapists and Certified Dental Assistants:  
An Endorsement of the call to action by the Chief Dental Officer of Canada**

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In November 2020, the Office of the Chief Dental Officer of Canada published *Human papillomavirus and oral health* (Office of the Chief Dental Officer of Canada, 2020). This document encourages oral health care providers to play a more substantive role in preventing Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) infection and HPV-related oropharyngeal cancers (OPC).

Canada is a world leader when it comes to the overall oral health of its citizens, and this is due in part to access to preventive care (Canadian Dental Association, 2017). However, recent studies reveal that the primary cause of oral cancers in high-income countries has shifted from tobacco consumption to oropharyngeal cancers caused by an oral HPV infection (Chaturvedi et al., 2013).

According to a 2017 study, the proportion of oropharyngeal cancer caused by HPV in Canada has increased from 47% to 74% (Habbous et al., 2017). While cervical cancer is the most well-known HPV-associated cancer, the number of oropharyngeal cancers has surpassed the number of cervical cancers. It has become the most common type of cancer caused by HPV in Canada (Canadian Cancer Society's Advisory Committee on Cancer Statistics, 2016). However, there is no routine screening program available for HPV-related oropharyngeal cancer, unlike cervical cancer (Kreimer & Waterboer, 2018).

Due to this evolving local epidemiology, the Chief Dental Officer has recommended that all oral health professionals play a key role in preventing HPV infection and HPV-related oropharyngeal cancers (Office of the Chief Dental Officer of Canada, 2020). Oral health is significantly associated with the risk of oral HPV infection, irrespective of smoking and oral sex practices (Bui et al., 2013). Dental hygienists, dental therapists, and certified dental assistants have the obligation and the unique opportunity to bridge the knowledge gap between oral health and the evolving landscape of HPV-related oral and oropharyngeal cancer (Office of the Chief Dental Officer of Canada, 2020).

**BCDHA endorses the call to action made by the Chief Dental Officer of Canada** and acknowledges the critical contributions that dental hygienists, dental therapists and certified dental assistants can make in reducing the incidence of oral HPV infection and HPV-related OPC. We support the need for oral health professionals to improve screening practices, risk assessment, education and evidence-based preventive interventions and encourage all members to create and implement plans to support preventive action for their patient's health and well-being.

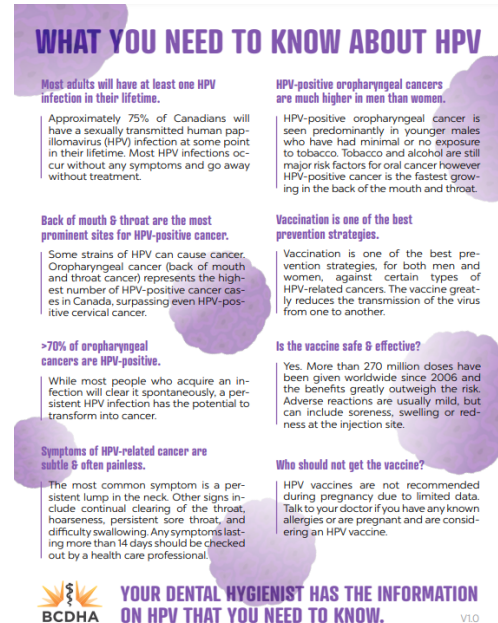
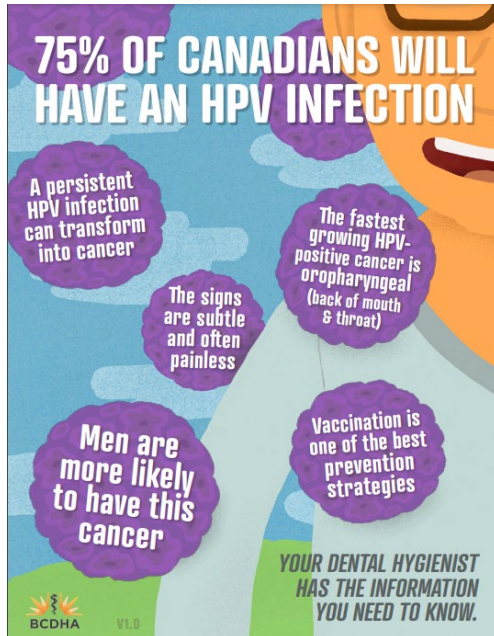
To support our members in this effort, BCDHA has a three-part [on-demand webinar series](#).

1. [HPV-Related Head and Neck Cancers: A Changing Epidemiology](#)
2. [HPV-The Impact on Screening Practices](#)
3. [HPV-Risk Management and Prevention Strategies](#)

Additional [resources](#) for oral health care providers:

[HPV Campaign Poster](#)

[HPV Campaign Handout](#)



## References

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