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Can Cancers in Adolescents Be Prevented?

Most cancers in teens do not have a known cause, so it's not possible to prevent all of them. But some can be prevented.

Limiting lifestyle-related and environmental risk factors

Unlike with many cancers in older adults, lifestyle-related risk factors (such as smoking) are not thought to play much of a role in cancers in teens. A few environmental factors, such as [radiation exposure](#)¹, have been linked with cancer risk in teens. But some exposures may be unavoidable, such as if a child needs radiation therapy to treat cancer.

There are some things you can do to lower your risk of getting certain kinds of cancer, such as:

- [Not smoking](#)²
- [Limiting time spent in the sun and avoiding tanning salons](#)³
- Limiting the number of sex partners and using safe sex practices, which can lower the risk of some infections linked to cancer, such as [human papilloma virus \(HPV\)](#)⁴ and [human immunodeficiency virus \(HIV\)](#)⁵

While lifestyle-related and environmental risk factors don't have a large effect on cancers in teens, exposure to these risk factors during the teenage years can still increase a person's risk of getting cancer as they get older. It's important to develop and maintain healthy habits early in life, such as not smoking, staying at a healthy weight, keeping active, and eating a healthy diet. Healthy habits like these can also lower your risk for many other types of health problems later on.

Vaccines to help prevent cancer

Some vaccines might lower a person's risk of getting cancer. For instance, a vaccine series is available to help prevent infection with **HPV (human papillomavirus)**, the group of viruses linked to cervical and 5 other cancers. Even though these cancers are more likely to develop later in life, these vaccines work best if they are given between age 9 and 12. Children and young adults age 13 to 26 who have not yet received the HPV vaccine, or who haven't gotten all their doses, should get vaccinated as soon as possible. For more information, see [HPV Vaccines⁶](#) and [HPV and Cancer⁷](#).

Vaccines can also help prevent **hepatitis B virus (HBV)** infection. Chronic infection with HBV is linked with an increased risk of liver cancer later in life.

Preventive surgery

Rarely, [people inherit gene mutations⁸](#) that make them very likely to get certain kinds of cancer at an early age. In such cases, some people and their doctors might decide on surgery to remove an organ before cancer has a chance to develop there. Again, this is not common.

Hyperlinks

1. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/radiation-exposure.html
2. www.cancer.org/healthy/stay-away-from-tobacco.html
3. www.cancer.org/healthy/be-safe-in-sun.html
4. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/infectious-agents/hpv.html
5. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/infectious-agents/hiv-infection-aids.html
6. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/infectious-agents/hpv/hpv-vaccines.html
7. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/infectious-agents/hpv/hpv-and-cancer-info.html
8. www.cancer.org/cancer/cancer-causes/genetics/family-cancer-syndromes.html

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Saslow D, Andrews KS, Manassaram-Baptiste D, et al. Human papillomavirus

vaccination 2020 guideline update: American Cancer Society guideline adaptation. *CA Cancer J Clin.* 2020; DOI: 10.3322/caac.21616.

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