



# HPV Cancer Prevention Program

## Preventing HPV Cancers with Rural Communities: Updates and Opportunities

### Quarterly Updates Meeting

#### Summary

November 29, 2023

2:00 – 3:00 pm ET/1:00 – 2:00 pm CT

Access the recording of the Rural HPV Vaccination Quarterly Updates Meeting at: [sjr-redesign.stjude.org/content/dam/research-redesign/videos/cristobal-hpv-11292023.mp4](http://sjr-redesign.stjude.org/content/dam/research-redesign/videos/cristobal-hpv-11292023.mp4)

#### Presenters:

- Heather Brandt, PhD, Director, HPV Cancer Prevention Program, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital
- Cristobal Valdebenito, MA, Coordinator, HPV Cancer Prevention Program, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital
- Christina (Tina) Turpin, Director, ACS National HPV Vaccination Roundtable
- Jennifer Nkonga, MS, Senior Director, Regional Strategy & Implementation, American Cancer Society

#### Priorities for Improving Rural HPV Vaccination Coverage – Heather Brandt, PhD

In rural areas, people experience higher rates of HPV cancers as compared the urban populations and have lower HPV vaccination rates. This is the rationale for the focus on improving HPV cancer prevention with rural communities, which are incredibly diverse and full of assets. The HPV Cancer Prevention Program at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital first held an [introductory meeting](#) in January 2023 to focus on efforts to improve rural HPV vaccination coverage. Following this meeting

Access and share the following rural HPV vaccination resources:

- Website: [stjude.org/hpvrural](http://stjude.org/hpvrural)
- Preventing HPV Cancers in Rural Communities [fact sheet](#)
- January 2023: St. Jude Rural HPV Vaccination Introductory Meeting [recording](#) and [materials](#)
- March 2023: Improving HPV Cancer Prevention with Rural Communities [recording](#)
- National Rural Health Day 2023 resources here
- Wide Open Spaces articles are available at [stjude.org/hpvrural](http://stjude.org/hpvrural) – read the latest article [here](#)

Additional resources focused on improving HPV vaccination with rural communities includes:

- Offering Programming on Rural HPV Vaccination: International HPV Awareness Day (IHAD) 2023
  - Started by offering programming in this space, such as the IHAD webinar “Wide Open Spaces: Improving HPV Cancer Prevention with Rural Communities” to build on the programming from January.
  - The IHAD event featured presentations from experts, an HPV cancer survivor, and a clinician treating HPV cancers in a rural area.
- Convening a Rural HPV Vaccination Think Tank

- Conformation of the Rural Think Tank as a group for interdisciplinary discussion and idea sharing to provide recommendations and inform action.
- The group met 4 times during a 6-month period to discuss how collaborating partners (e.g., St. Jude, American Cancer Society, and the American Academy of Pediatrics) could optimize collective efforts.
- Rural HPV Vaccination Priorities
  - Starting HPV vaccination at age 9 is a promising strategy for increasing coverage in rural areas. This is consistent with other organizations' recommendations, such as the AAP and ACS.
  - Other priority action steps for HPV coverage in rural areas concentrate on how we can gather the information we require to inform these priority actions while acting on the existing data.
  - There is plenty of opportunity for allies and partners to collaborate and participate in the progress of rural HPV vaccination priorities (e.g., by joining the quarterly meetings, showcasing your work, and others).
  - We have listed the [Priority Action Steps](#) in our HPV Rural Website.

### **Future directions on rural HPV priority action steps – Cristóbal Valdebenito**

St. Jude has taken a lead role in understanding and consolidating existing resources for Rural HPV Vaccination, aiming to enhance vaccination coverage in rural areas.

- The first priority action step we are leading involves crowdsourcing resources from healthcare professionals, leaders, and residents in rural settings, then making them accessible via an online platform like Dropbox or St. Jude's rural website. Resources will be tracked in a master document for easy sharing.
- A second priority action step pertains to training healthcare providers in rural areas. This involves searching for existing training materials adaptable to HPV vaccination education and exploring online training opportunities. An online platform will be utilized to gather and disseminate various training materials, including interactive modules and webinars. Best practices from other regions will also be evaluated for implementation in rural communities.
- Other priorities include advocacy and policy analysis to understand how policies affect HPV vaccination in rural areas, data collection on vaccination rates and related cancers, and dissemination of resources for National Rural Health Day.
- St. Jude has developed resources such as fact sheets, meeting recordings, and rural-focused articles to support HPV vaccination efforts in rural communities. These resources aim to address policy decisions and factors influencing vaccination coverage in the US.

### **ACS National HPV Vaccination Roundtable – Christina (Tina) Turpin**

The ACS National HPV Vaccination Roundtable seeks to eliminate vaccine-preventable HPV cancers by prioritizing cervical cancer as a public health issue. The ACS proposes an elimination goal of  $\leq 4$  cases per 100,000 persons by 2030–2038, with a long-term goal of  $\leq 1$  per 100,000 by 2063. This is particularly important since NIS teen data indicate lower vaccination rates in rural states and there is strong evidence starting vaccination at age 9 improves completion rates.

Resources shared during this webinar include:

- A collection by the HPV Roundtable and partners of [25 research articles](#) and [video abstracts](#) on [initiating vaccination at age 9](#).
- [Free provider education series](#) with six sessions covering vaccine hesitancy & communication, HPV 101, current guidelines and why age 9 matters, disparities and unique populations, effective EBI's and implementation, and an expert panel.
- [Emerging Leaders Program](#): 10 emerging leaders from diverse backgrounds come together to work on three projects regarding geographic disparities.

### **ACS: Geographic Focus on Rural HPV Vaccination – Jennifer Nkonga**

The ACS Mountain West HPV Vaccination Project, initiated in 2020, targets reducing geographic disparities in HPV vaccination rates among adolescents in rural states. The project encompasses a regional consortium,

quality improvement initiatives, and professional education efforts. Positive trends in up-to-date vaccination rates were observed from 2019 to 2021, yet significant geographic disparities persist in rural areas.

Key takeaways:

- The [Mountain West project](#) owes its success to four pillars: Regional Consortium, Quality Improvement, ongoing Technical Assistance, and expert guidance to Support the Implementation of best practices.
- Programmatic activities were delivered online, including ECHO sessions, focusing on healthcare professionals' education. There was interest from dental providers, pharmacies, and medical students in learning about HPV vaccination.
- Efforts to engage healthcare professionals through grand rounds and conferences were emphasized, with shared resources including specialized learning series and educational sessions.
- [The HPV Cancer Free Texas 2023 project](#), targeting 26 rural counties in northern Texas, focused on various elements such as pharmacy collaboration and school-based vaccination programs. Notably, community health worker and school nurse programs were pivotal, training individuals in HPV disease and exploring school-based vaccination opportunities.
- Looking ahead to 2024, the ACS plans to disseminate lessons learned from these projects at the national level and launch a national rural health system learning community. Additionally, efforts will focus on expanding offerings on the community health worker ECHO model and developing a summer social media package to further address geographic disparities in HPV vaccination rates.

## Discussion

Q. Will there be a rural focus as part of the elimination plan?

A. The ACS is convening a task group in January 2024, in which they will be looking into geographic disparities.

Q. The Mountain West Project was a huge undertaking, covering a large rural area. What are the differences in rural communities by state and/or among the diverse people living in those areas?

A. There are a lot of cultural and religious issues that have come up (e.g., freedom about taking or not the vaccine). Other issues that require accurate planning are vaccine misinformation. However, it is key to find key partners, especially in rural areas.

Q. One of the action steps derived from the think tank was communication. What does this entail and when would it be available for rural communities?

A. St. Jude is working with an external communications firm to develop a suite of materials and resources that are developed with rural parents, caregivers, healthcare providers, and people living in rural areas. However, it is important to consider that there is considerable diversity even within rural communities which requires different messaging (e.g., religious concerns regarding vaccination, personal freedom, and self-sufficiency). The goal is to have these materials and resources ready by the first half of 2024.

- Sometimes providers in rural settings are not aware of current HPV guidelines and there is a need for vaccine advocacy, especially for those aged 9.
- School-based vaccination through the nurse initiative and the vaccine mobile unit may be successful strategies in certain rural settings.

## Next Preventing HPV Cancers with Rural Communities: Updates and Opportunities

February 21, 2024, 2:00 – 3:00 PM ET / 1:00 – 2:00 PM CT.

You can register by following our [link in the HPV Rural Website](#) or by

<https://stjude.webex.com/weblink/register/rb6e6d58c8821da59dd274efabba6fb97>

Visit the rural HPV vaccination website at [stjude.org/HPVrural](https://stjude.org/HPVrural).

Email [PreventHPV@stjude.org](mailto:PreventHPV@stjude.org) with any questions.