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## National HPV Vaccination Drive: Protecting Girls from Cervical Cancer

3 February – 28 March 2026

The Department of Health has launched the first round of South Africa's national Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign, running from 3 February to 28 March, with the goal of protecting young girls from cervical cancer later in life.

This campaign aligns with International HPV Awareness Day on 4 March, highlighting the urgent need to increase awareness of HPV - a common but preventable cause of several cancers.

### Why HPV vaccination matters

HPV is a highly contagious virus that affects both males and females and is transmitted through skin-to-skin contact. While most infections cause no symptoms, certain high-risk strains can lead to cancer, including cancers of the cervix, vagina, vulva, anus, penis, mouth and throat.

Cervical cancer remains a significant public health concern in South Africa, with an estimated 13,800 new cases diagnosed each year. Globally, over 95% of cervical cancer cases are caused by HPV, making prevention both possible and essential.

According to the Cancer Association of South Africa (CANSA) and research partners, HPV vaccination can prevent up to 90% of cervical and anal cancers, as well as most other HPV-related cancers. The single-dose HPV vaccine is safe, effective and provides long-term protection when given before exposure to the virus.

### Who should be vaccinated

The national campaign targets girls aged 9 years and older, offering protection well before the risk of HPV exposure. Parents and caregivers are strongly encouraged to provide consent so their daughters can receive the vaccine.

The first round of HPV vaccinations will be administered by trained healthcare workers at the following schools:

- **Public schools:** 3 February – 28 March
- **Private / Independent & Special Needs schools:** 4 August – 28 September
- Parents will receive consent forms prior to vaccination and girls 12 years and older may provide their own assent.

Preventing HPV and cervical cancer requires a combined approach of vaccination, education and regular screening later in life. This national vaccination drive represents a critical step in reducing future cancer risk and giving all our girls one less worry tomorrow.

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# Sexually Transmitted Infections and Condom Week

## 3 – 7 February 2026

February is recognised in South Africa as Sexual and Reproductive Health and Healthy Lifestyle Month, which includes STI/Condom Week from 3 to 7 February 2025. This awareness week focuses on preventing the spread of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), reducing HIV transmission, and promoting informed, stigma-free access to care.

STIs remain a significant public health challenge in South Africa, despite most being preventable and many curable. Fear of stigma and discrimination often discourages people from seeking treatment, increasing the risk of long-term health complications and further transmission. STIs are caused by bacteria, viruses or parasites and can be spread through sexual activity, skin-to-skin contact, from mother to child during birth, through contaminated blood transfusions, or by sharing needles. Common STIs include chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, genital herpes, genital warts and HIV.

Symptoms may include abnormal discharge, pain during urination, genital sores or ulcers, swellings in the groin, and genital warts – although many STIs show no symptoms at all. When left untreated, STIs can lead to infertility, chronic pain and adverse pregnancy outcomes. In South Africa, STI testing and

treatment are available free of charge at primary healthcare clinics, making early intervention accessible.

### Preventing STIs requires awareness, openness and collective responsibility:

- **Stop stigma** so people feel safe to seek testing and treatment
- **Communicate** openly with partners and educate young people about sexual health
- **Cooperate** with healthcare services and ensure partners access care
- **Condomise** – consistent and correct condom use remains one of the most effective prevention tools

STI/Condom Week is a reminder that protecting sexual health protects lives, relationships and futures.

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## Healthy Lifestyle Awareness Day

### 21 February 2026

Observed annually on 21 February, Healthy Lifestyle Awareness Day encourages individuals, workplaces and communities to reflect on everyday habits that support long-term health and wellbeing. The day forms part of Healthy Lifestyle Awareness Month in February and reinforces the importance of prevention, balance and informed lifestyle choices.

Across South Africa, lifestyle-related factors such as poor nutrition, physical inactivity, smoking and excessive alcohol consumption continue to contribute to the rise of non-communicable diseases, including heart disease, diabetes and obesity. Healthy Lifestyle Awareness Day highlights that many of these risks can be reduced through consistent, manageable changes.

#### The Building Blocks of Healthy Living

A healthy lifestyle is supported by a few key pillars:

- **Balanced nutrition** – prioritising fruits, vegetables, whole grains and lean proteins while limiting sugar and processed foods.
- **Regular physical activity** – aiming for at least 150 minutes of moderate exercise per week, whether through walking, cycling, stretching or structured workouts.
- **Rest and stress management** – quality sleep, mindfulness and taking time to recharge are essential for both physical and mental resilience.
- **Mental and social wellbeing** – maintaining strong connections, seeking support when needed and fostering positive relationships.

- Reducing harmful habits – avoiding smoking and moderating alcohol intake to lower long-term health risks.

Embracing a healthy lifestyle at work means that you are more engaged and resilient. Prioritising wellbeing at work allows you to be better equipped to manage stress, maintain productivity and reduce preventable health risks. Workplace wellness initiatives play an important role in supporting preventative healthcare and sustainable risk management.

#### This 21 February, consider simple actions that can make a difference:

- Set one achievable health goal
- Participate in a wellness or movement activity
- Encourage conversations around wellbeing
- Schedule regular health check-ups

#### A Moment for Progress, Not Perfection

Healthy Lifestyle Awareness Day is not about drastic change - it's about progress. By making small, informed choices each day, you can build healthier habits that support long-term wellbeing.

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## References

### **National HPV Vaccination Drive**

For more information, please visit: <https://cansa.org.za/one-dose-of-hpv-vaccine-one-less-worry-for-cervical-cancer/>

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### **Sexually Transmitted Infections and Condom Week**

To find out more, please visit the National Institute for Communicable Diseases (NICD): [www.nicd.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/STI-Awareness-Week\\_Healthcare-workers.pdf](http://www.nicd.ac.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/STI-Awareness-Week_Healthcare-workers.pdf)

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