



**FRIENDS,
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March 2026

HPV Vaccination in Gypsy and Traveller Communities: Guidance for Professionals

Compiled by Friends, Families and Travellers

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Introduction

Gypsy and Traveller communities experience significant health inequalities, including low attendance at preventative healthcare and screening, lower vaccination uptake, and limited awareness of health issues¹. These inequalities are linked to barriers in accessing care, particularly public health messaging designed for the wider population².

People should have the right to make informed health decisions, with control and autonomy over their choices. This briefing draws on community-led insight into the HPV (human papillomavirus) vaccination and sets out practical actions for health professionals, schools, and local authority services to improve access, understanding, and trust.

Key issues

Insight shows that HPV awareness is low within Gypsy and Traveller communities, and the vaccine is often associated with sexual activity over cancer prevention. Where the vaccine is known, it is usually understood as being for 'girls only', with little awareness that boys are also eligible. Cancer is also rarely discussed openly within familial and social units, often viewed as 'bad luck', which can make prevention conversations difficult.

The current school-based delivery model and digital consent process create significant barriers, particularly for children who are home educated or living nomadically. Literacy barriers, including reliance on written letters and consent forms that are not always accessible or easily understood, alongside limited follow-up when school invitations are missed, further reduce uptake.

¹ House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee, *Tackling inequalities faced by Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities*, Seventh Report of Session 2017–19, HC 360 (2019).

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmwomeq/360/360.pdf>

² Friends, Families and Travellers. (2023). [Test, treat and trace for Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities](#)

Evidence has shown that Gypsies and Travellers can experience barriers to GP access when attempting to register without a fixed address, including refusal of service, which can further limit prevention as well as reinforcing mistrust³. Past negative experiences with healthcare professionals, including feeling dismissed or judged, alongside stigma around sensitive health topics, further reduce confidence in the vaccine (and healthcare systems at large).

Recommendations for health professionals

- Offer flexible appointments, including drop-in sessions, longer slots, and scheduling at the end of the day, recognising that families often attend together with children, relatives, or chaperones. Where possible, provide same-gender clinicians to support comfort and privacy.
- Provide information in accessible formats (short videos, easy-read leaflets) and support with forms, translators, or verbal consent where needed.
- Use parents' or carers' preferred contact methods (e.g. WhatsApp) for appointment reminders and follow-up, recognising that some may not reliably receive post.
- Provide community-based clinics or a mobile health bus at preferred locations such as roadside cafés and supermarket car parks. Ensure spaces are confidential and offer wider health checks alongside the HPV vaccination to reduce stigma and encourage uptake.
- Support children who miss school-based HPV vaccination through GP or community routes and avoid requiring GP registration for vaccine access.
- When registering temporary patients, check their vaccination history, including whether children have been offered the HPV vaccine.
- Health visitors and specialist school nurses should use visits with younger children as an opportunity to check that older children are up to date with vaccinations, applying the Making Every Contact Count approach.

Recommendations for schools

- Provide physical consent forms directly to parents or carers, rather than relying on online portals, posted letters, or sending forms via the child, and report to the GP any child who has missed the HPV vaccination.

³ Sweeney, S., & Worrall, S., *No room at the inn: How easy is it for nomadic Gypsies and Travellers to access primary care?* Friends, Families and Travellers (2019). <https://www.gypsy-traveller.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/No-room-at-the-inn-findings-from-mystery-shopping-GP-practices.pdf>

- For families who are travelling, provide alternative ways to communicate, such as WhatsApp messages, short voice clips, or other suitable methods.
- When new students enrol, including Gypsy and Traveller children, schools should check whether they have already received the HPV vaccination and provide information or support as needed.
- Appoint a named, accessible staff member as a main contact for children with questions about HPV vaccinations.
- Ensure children have private, safe opportunities to ask questions, recognising that some may not feel comfortable speaking to adults.
- Where vaccinations are delivered in school, offer the option for a parent or trusted adult to attend if this would support the child's comfort and understanding.

Recommendations for local authorities, home education teams, Traveller education teams, and ethnic minority achievement services

- Local services should contact parents or carers of children on the elective home education list and maintain robust monitoring of children's health and wellbeing.
- Establish the preferred method for families to receive information and ensure all materials are accessible and clearly presented.
- Follow up to confirm parents have received the information and provide guidance or signposting to further support as needed.

About us

Friends, Families and Travellers (FFT) is a leading national charity that seeks to end racism and discrimination against Gypsies, Travellers and Roma communities and to protect the right to pursue a nomadic way of life. www.gypsy-traveller.org

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