

HPV Vaccine

July 2009



What is the HPV Vaccine?

Two vaccines have been developed that can protect against some types of a virus that causes cervical cancer. The virus is called Human Papillomavirus (HPV). One vaccine, Gardasil®, protects against four types of HPV which cause 70 percent of cervical cancers and 90 percent of genital warts. Gardasil was approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in June 2007 for girls and women ages 9 to 26 years. The other vaccine, Cervarix®, will protect against the two types of HPV that cause 70 percent of cervical cancers. This vaccine has not been licensed by the FDA.

The vaccines will not protect against all types of HPV or other sexually transmitted infections. The vaccines also will not prevent pregnancy. It is hard to know how long new vaccines will protect against disease. So far, studies show that protection lasts at least 5 years and suggest that protection will last much longer. Research will continue to determine how long each vaccine's protection lasts.

Who should get the vaccine and when should they get it?

The federal Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends Gardasil for all girls age 11 to 12 years. Gardasil can also be given to girls as young as 9 years if their health care provider recommends it. The vaccine is also recommended for girls and women aged 13-26 years who did not get the vaccine at a younger age.

The vaccine is given as a series of three doses (shots) over a six month period. The HPV vaccine has the maximum preventive impact if given before sexual activity begins. Current vaccine research has focused on girls and women. There is limited information about how well the vaccine works in boys and men and studies are ongoing to learn more.

Will the vaccine help if I already have HPV?

The vaccine will not protect women against any type of HPV in the vaccine that they already acquired. Most women have not been infected with all the types of HPV that are in the vaccine, so they will still benefit from vaccination. The HPV vaccine will do no harm if you are already infected.

Who gets a vaccine supply from the Washington State Department of Health?

Most providers make the HPV vaccine available to qualifying patients through Washington State's Childhood Vaccine Program. This state-supplied vaccine is free-of-charge. However, providers may charge an administration fee (which can be waived if the patient can't pay). A patient may qualify for state-supplied vaccine if under 19 years of age and any of the following apply:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Enrolled in Medicaid or other state-sponsored health program such as the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), Child Health Program (CHP) or Basic Health
- Privately insured, but policy does not cover HPV vaccination (policies vary so you will need to check)
- Not insured

Where can I get it?

Ask your doctor, nurse, or local health clinic to find out whether you need the vaccine and where you can get it.

What is HPV and how does it affect the body?

HPV is a very common virus. There are many types of HPV. Most are harmless and do not cause infections or symptoms. Some types of HPV can cause cervical cancer or genital warts.

How is it spread?

HPV is spread through genital contact. Most people who have HPV do not have symptoms. They can easily spread the virus to others without even knowing they have it.

Who can get it?

At least 50 percent of sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives. Both women and men can get HPV, and spread it to others without realizing they have the virus. HPV infection is most common in women and men in their late teens and early 20's.

The best way to prevent HPV is to abstain from all sexual activity. People with only one lifetime partner can get HPV if their partner was sexually active in a previous relationship. It is not known how much protection condoms provide against HPV, since areas that are not covered by a condom can be exposed to the virus. Condoms may reduce the risk of genital warts and cervical cancer. They can also reduce the risk of HIV and some other STIs, when used all the time and the correct way (*from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention HPV Vaccine Questions & Answers, August 2006*).

How do I know if I have HPV?

Some people know they have HPV because they have symptoms, such as genital warts. Most people **don't know** they have HPV because they have no signs or symptoms.

Women may find out they have HPV through cervical cancer screening (Pap tests) and HPV antibody testing. Healthcare providers usually do not test for HPV unless they find abnormal cervical cell changes. Providers don't routinely test women or men for HPV at this time. Talk to your doctor, nurse, or clinic if you have questions about HPV testing.

How does HPV cause cervical cancer?

Most HPV infections clear up on their own, but some types of HPV can infect cells in the cervix (the opening to the uterus/womb) and cause abnormalities. If the infection continues untreated, the abnormalities can lead to cervical cancer. This is usually a slow process. It can take years for HPV infection to progress to cervical cancer.

Pap tests can detect cell changes long before cervical cancer develops. Women who get the HPV vaccine should continue getting Pap tests. The vaccines do not protect against all the types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer.

Where can I find more information?

HPV Infection & Vaccine

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices
American Social Health Association
Food and Drug Administration

www.cdc.gov/std/hpv
www.cdc.gov/vaccines/recs/acip/default.htm
www.ashastd.org
www.fda.gov/cber/vaccines.htm

Cervical Cancer

American Cancer Society
National Cancer Institute

www.cancer.org
www.cancer.gov

Washington State Department of Health Programs

Breast and Cervical Health Program
Comprehensive Cancer Control
Family Planning and Reproductive Health
Immunization Program CHILD Profile
Sexually Transmitted Diseases

www.doh.wa.gov/wbchp
www.doh.wa.gov/cc
www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/FPRH
www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/immunize
www.doh.wa.gov/cfh/std/

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