

HPV and the HPV Vaccine



What is HPV?

Genital Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) is a very common virus that is passed through the genital tract, usually through vaginal or anal sex. There are many strains of the virus, 40 of which are known to cause genital warts, precancerous cervical changes or cervical cancer.

How common is HPV?

At least 50% of sexually active people will get HPV at some point in their lives (some studies find as much as 85%). Sexual protection during intercourse does not protect you from HPV. The more sexual partners you have, the more likely it is that you will contract HPV. Even if you only have had one or two partners, you could still carry the virus. Most people who carry the virus don't have any signs or symptoms and don't know that have it. More than 6 million cases are diagnosed each year in the United States.

How do I know if I have HPV?

You probably won't know that you have HPV unless you develop genital warts or have an abnormal PAP smear.

What happens if I get HPV?

Usually your body will clear the virus in a few years. If not cleared, you can get warts or precancerous changes on your cervix.

What does the HPV vaccine protect against?

The HPV vaccine protects against the two HPV types that cause 70% of cervical cancers (Types 16 & 18) and the two HPV types that cause 90 % of genital warts (Types 6 & 11).

What does the HPV vaccine NOT protect against?

The vaccine DOES NOT PROTECT AGAINST ALL TYPES OF HPV. Therefore, it will not prevent all cases of cervical cancer or genital warts. About 30% of cervical cancer WILL NOT be prevented by this vaccine. This means it is very important that all women continue to be screened for cervical cancer (getting regular PAP smears). Also, the vaccine DOES NOT prevent 10% of genital warts. The vaccine WILL NOT prevent any other sexually transmitted diseases, like Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, Trichomonas, Herpes, Syphilis, Hepatitis or HIV.

How long does the vaccine protection last? Will a booster shot be needed?

The length of vaccine protection (immunity) is usually not known when a vaccine is first introduced. So far, studies have followed women for five years and found that they are protected. More research is being done to find out how long protection will last and if a booster vaccine is needed year later.

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Why is the vaccine only recommended for females, ages 9 to 26?

The vaccine has been extensively tested in 9 to 26 year old females, but research on the vaccine's efficacy has only recently begun with males and females over 26 years of age. The FDA will consider licensing the vaccine for these other groups when the research shows that it is safe and effective in those groups.

Why is the HPV vaccine recommended for such young girls?

Ideally, females should get the vaccine before they are sexually active because the vaccine is most effective in females who have not yet acquired any of the HPV vaccine types. Females who have not been infected with any HPV vaccine type will get the full benefits of the vaccine. By giving the vaccine before any possibility of sexually activity, the most benefit is obtained.

What if I already have HPV?

If you are in the recommended age group, you should still get the vaccine. There is no way to know exactly what type(s) of HPV you have and you can benefit from protection from the other types in the vaccine.

How is the HPV vaccine given?

The HPV vaccine is a series of three separate intramuscular injections given in your upper arm. The second dose is given 2 months after the first dose. The third dose is given 6 months after the first dose. It is important to adhere to this schedule or the vaccine effectiveness may be compromised.

Who pays for the HPV vaccine?

Historically, insurance companies do not cover newly approved vaccines or tests for several months. Our staff has a list of insurers that currently cover the vaccine. If your insurance is not on the list, we recommend you do the following:

1. Call your insurance company and ask if they cover Gardasil (the HPV vaccine). If you find you do have coverage, notify us and we will add them to the list.
2. If they say no – ask them if they plan to cover it and when? Tell them it is important to your health and/or your child's health and recommend they cover it. Once it is covered, you can start the series.
3. If you wish to start the vaccine series and your insurance does not cover it, our staff will be happy to discuss the charges and options for payment.

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