

What Parents of Preteens/Adolescents Should Know About the HPV Vaccine

There is now a three-dose vaccine that protects against four common types of genital human papillomavirus (HPV), which cause most cervical cancers and genital warts. This HPV vaccine has been licensed by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as safe and effective for females, ages 9 to 26 years.

What is HPV and What are its Health Effects?

HPV is a common virus that is passed on during sex. There are about 40 types of HPV that can infect men and women. Most sexually active adults get HPV at some time in their lives, although most never know it because HPV usually has no symptoms and goes away on its own. But:

- Some types of HPV can cause cervical cancer in women.
- Other types of HPV can cause genital warts.

The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2006, over 9,700 women were diagnosed with cervical cancer, and 3,700 women died from it in the United States.

It is estimated that about 1 million sexually active people in the United States have visible genital warts at any point in time.

- The HPV vaccine is recommended for 11- to 12-year-old girls, and can be given to girls as young as 9. The vaccine also is recommended for 13- to 26-year-old girls/women who have not yet received all three doses.
- Ideally, girls should get the vaccine before they become sexually active, since this vaccine is most effective in girls/women who have not yet acquired any of the HPV vaccine types.
- In girls/women who have not been infected with any of the four HPV types, the vaccine has been shown to be about 100% effective in preventing precancers of the cervix, vulva, and vagina, and genital warts caused by those HPV types.
- The vaccine is given through a series of three shots over a six-month period. Your daughter will need to come back for the second and third shots two and six months (respectively) after the first shot. It is very important that she receive all three shots, since it is not yet known how much protection she would get from receiving only one or two shots of the vaccine.
- The vaccine causes no serious side effects. The most common side effect is soreness at the injection site.
- The HPV vaccine costs about \$120 per dose (\$360 for the series). You may be able to get it for free or at low-cost through your health insurance plan or federal or state programs. More information about these programs is available from your doctor's office or the local health department.

Keep in mind...

When vaccinated girls are older, they will still need to get regular Pap tests within three years of becoming sexually active (or by age 21), since the vaccine does not protect against all cervical cancers. Also, once they become sexually active, they will still need to practice protective sexual behaviors, since the vaccine will not prevent all cases of genital warts, nor will it prevent other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

Other ways to prevent HPV and related diseases

- The vaccine protects against the types of HPV that most commonly cause cervical cancer and genital warts. But the only sure way to prevent all types of HPV is to abstain from all sexual activity.
- Condoms may lower a person's chances of getting HPV and developing HPV-related diseases, when used all the time and the right way. But condoms may not *fully* protect against HPV, since HPV can infect areas that are not covered by a condom. Even people with only one lifetime sex partner can get HPV, if their partner has been infected with HPV.
- Regular Pap tests and follow-up treatment can prevent most, but not all, cases of cervical cancer.

What about a vaccine for boys, men, or women over age 26?

We do not yet know if the vaccine is safe and effective in boys/men, or in women over 26 years of age. Research is now being done with males and older women. The FDA will consider licensing the vaccine for these other groups when there is proof that it is safe and effective for them.

If you have questions, please write them down and ask about them during your next doctor's visit. You can also call:

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636); 1-888-232-6348 TTY

Operators can answer your questions in English or Spanish 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service (CIS)

1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237); 1-800-332-8615 TTY

Information specialists can answer your questions in English or Spanish from 9:00am to 4:30pm in your time zone.

