

5 Questions To Ask Before You Get the HPV Vaccine

Which type of vaccine should I get?

Currently, the Food and Drug Administration has approved only one type of HPV vaccine. This vaccine protects against HPV strains 16 and 18, which have been linked to cervical cancer and precancer, and HPV types 6 and 11, which cause most cases of genital warts.

Will I need more than one shot?

Yes. You will need three separate shots over a 6-month period.

What should I expect after the vaccine—will there be any side effects?

Medical studies show that the HPV vaccine is very safe. It will cause some temporary soreness, redness, or swelling at the site where you get the shot. Some women may get a fever, headache, nausea, or dizziness after getting the shot.

Do I need a Pap test or HPV test before I get the vaccine?

No. But after you get the vaccine, you should begin to get—or continue to have—regular Pap tests, because the vaccine doesn't protect against all types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer. Also, some people may not get full protection against the specific types of HPV the vaccine is designed to prevent—for instance, if they've already been exposed to HPV or haven't had all three shots.

How long will the HPV vaccine last?

Currently, it appears that the vaccine protects against HPV for at least 5 years, but studies need to be done to see how long vaccinated people remain immune and whether booster shots are needed.

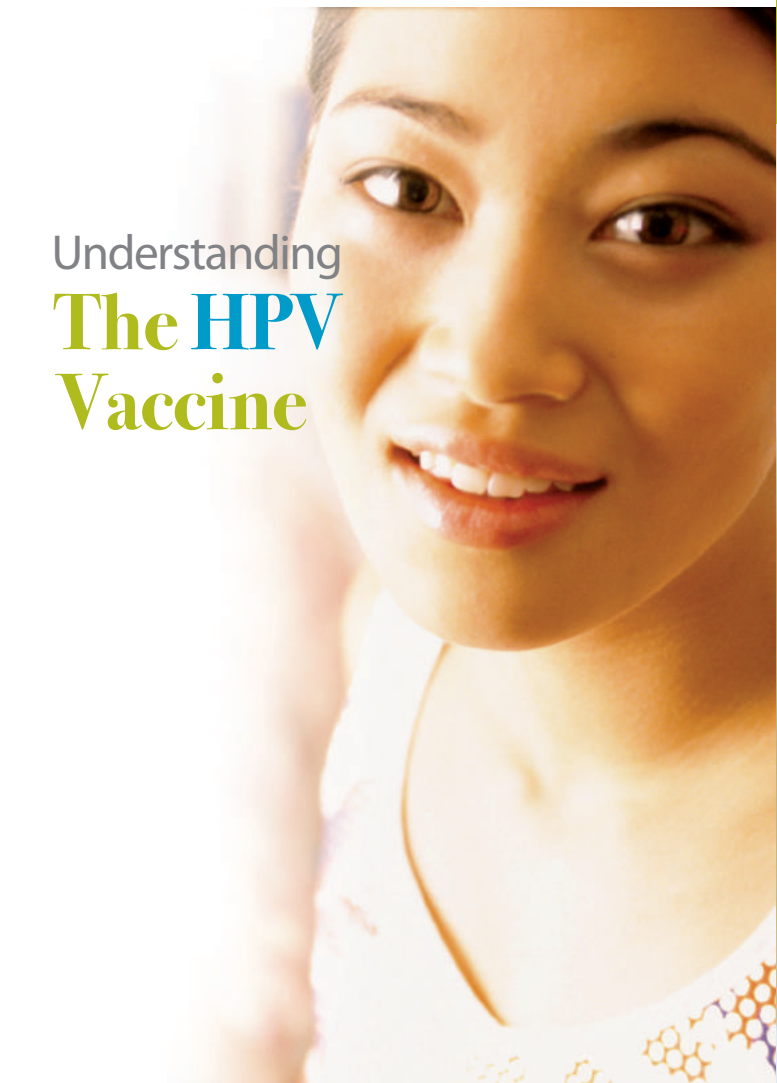
This publication is funded through an unrestricted educational grant from a collaboration of companies including Digene Corporation, GlaxoSmithKline, Graceway Pharmaceuticals, Merck and Co. Inc., and Roche Diagnostics.

Clinical Advisors: Francisco Garcia, MD, Nancy Berman, MSN,
Lorraine Wallace, PhD
Writer: Nancy Monson



ARHP
2401 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Suite 350
Washington, DC 20037-1730
www.arhp.org
© 2007

Understanding The HPV Vaccine



- HPV stands for *Human PapillomaVirus*.
- HPV is very common. Most people who have sex will develop an HPV infection at some point in their lives.
- There are more than 100 different types of HPV. Some types can cause genital warts, and about 15 types can cause cervical cancer.
- Most people who get HPV do not even know it. Often, they find out they have HPV only if they get genital warts or their health care provider diagnoses the infection through a Pap test or HPV test.
- In healthy people, most HPV infections will go away on their own within 6 to 24 months. There is no treatment for an HPV infection itself.
- Rarely, women are infected with certain types of HPV, particularly types 16 or 18, which may linger and cause precancer changes or cancer in the cervix.
- The Pap and HPV tests can find abnormal cells caused by HPV, so these cells can be removed before they become cancer cells.
- An HPV vaccine is now available that can prevent some of the most common types of HPV. It may lessen your risk of all three problems caused by HPV: cervical cancer, precancer, and genital warts.

Association of Reproductive Health Professionals



How Does a Person Get HPV?

- HPV spreads from one person to another by skin-to-skin contact in the genital area.
- HPV can spread through vaginal, anal, and oral sex.





What the HPV Vaccine Does...

- The HPV vaccine is a series of three shots.
- The HPV vaccine stimulates your body's immune system to produce antibodies to certain HPV types, just as it would if you really had the virus.
- But it's important to know that **the vaccine does not infect you with HPV.**

Who Should Get the Vaccine?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the American Cancer Society recommend that all girls ages 11 to 12 get the HPV vaccine. However, girls as young as 9 can get the vaccine, too.

The vaccine works best in girls who have not yet had sex (who are still virgins) and/or have not been exposed to HPV.

Girls and women between the ages of 13 and 26 may want to get the HPV vaccine if they:

- have not been vaccinated yet
- have not gotten all three HPV shots yet
- have only recently become sexually active

At this time, the vaccine is not recommended for women over age 26, pregnant women, or boys and men.

If you are concerned about HPV infection, talk to your health care provider about how much protection the vaccine can provide.

Will the vaccine infect me with HPV?

No, the vaccine doesn't contain the live virus, so you can't get infected.

Why is this vaccine recommended for my daughter when she is so young?

The vaccine works best to prevent cervical cancer, precancer, and genital warts in girls who have not yet had sex or have not been exposed to HPV.

If I have my 9-year-old daughter get the HPV vaccine, do I have to explain sex to her?

It is your decision whether to tell your daughter about sex at this time. It is truthful to tell her that the vaccine will help prevent cervical cancer when she is a woman. You can also say it is another vaccine—like the ones she got for the measles and mumps—to help keep her from getting sick later on.

Why aren't boys and men being vaccinated too?

Scientists are studying the benefits of the HPV vaccine for boys and men; they don't know yet how well it works for them. Once researchers know it is safe and effective for boys and men, they may be able to get the vaccine, too.

How will the vaccine affect my risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs)?

The HPV vaccine will help keep you from getting some types of HPV. It will not protect you from getting other types of HPV or other STIs, such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, or HIV. Always use condoms if you have new sexual partners or if you or your partner is having sex with more than one person at a time.

Can I get the vaccine if I've had an abnormal Pap test or treatment for cervical cancer?

Yes. You can still get the vaccine, but it may not be as effective. Talk to your health care provider about how much protection the vaccine can provide.

Do I need to get an HPV test before I get the vaccine?

No. The HPV test can only tell you if you currently have an HPV infection. The HPV vaccine does not treat current infections but may prevent some future infections.

Will the vaccine get rid of an existing HPV infection?

No, it will not. The vaccine is for prevention, not treatment. It can help prevent genital warts, precancer, or cervical cancer related to HPV, but it can't treat any of these conditions if you already have them.

If I get the vaccine, can I stop having regular Pap tests?

No. You should continue to have regular Pap tests. This is because the HPV vaccine does not protect you from infection with all HPV types that put you at risk for cervical cancer, and the Pap test can find early changes that can be treated, before they have a chance to turn into cervical cancer. Starting at the age of 30, you may also be tested for HPV along with a Pap test.

Where can I get the vaccine?

You can get the HPV vaccine from your:

- pediatrician
- gynecologist
- family doctor
- nurse practitioner

How is the vaccine given?

The HPV vaccine is given as a series of three separate shots (doses) on the following schedule:

- Dose 1: You choose the date
- Dose 2: Two months after shot 1
- Dose 3: Four months after shot 2

How much does the vaccine cost?

Each dose costs about \$120, for a total of around \$360 for the series. Many health insurance companies may pay for the cost of all three doses. Some providers also will charge a fee to administer the doses.

Other Options for Prevention of Genital Warts and Cervical Cancer

Even after you get the HPV vaccine, you can still get other types of HPV and STIs. That's why it's important to...

- **Practice safe (or safer) sex.** That means using condoms with all sexual partners and any time that you or your partner is having sex with other people. Condoms won't protect you completely, but they are the best option aside from not having sex at all (abstinence).
- **Don't smoke.** Smoking can increase your risk of cervical cancer as well as cause other serious health problems.
- **Get screened regularly.** Have a Pap test starting 3 years after you first have sexual intercourse or by age 21. After that, have the test every year. You should have an HPV test, too, if you are 20 or older and your Pap test comes back as "inconclusive." Women age 30 and older should have Pap and HPV tests every 3 years if both are normal, or more often if the HPV test is positive.

