



The American College of
Obstetricians and Gynecologists
WOMEN'S HEALTH CARE PHYSICIANS

Frequently Asked Questions for Patients Concerning HPV Vaccination

What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common viral infection. Some types of HPV can cause genital warts. Other types can cause cancer of the cervix, vagina, vulva, penis, anus, mouth, and throat.

How common is HPV?

Human papillomavirus is a very common sexually transmitted infection. Eighty percent of sexually active people will get HPV sometime in their lives. About 79 million people in the United States have been infected with HPV and 14 million new infections occur every year. Most HPV infections do not result in cancer. Cervical cancer in women is the most common HPV-associated cancer. In the United States, there are approximately 13,000 cases of cervical cancer per year with more than 4,000 deaths annually.

Will I know if I have HPV?

Most people with HPV will not know that they have an HPV infection. Genital warts are a sign of an HPV infection. However, an infection of the cervix usually has no symptoms. With or without symptoms, an infected person can spread HPV to others.

How long do HPV infections last?

The immune system fights most HPV infections and clears them from the body in 1–3 years. Infections that are not cleared from the body are called “persistent infections.” This type of infection may cause precancerous cells and cancer.

Do all women with HPV infections get cancer?

No. In most women, HPV infections are cleared from the body in a few years. For women with persistent infections, regular screening is done with Pap tests. The Pap test looks for cells in the cervix that could be precancerous. Early detection and treatment of precancerous cells can prevent deaths due to cervical cancer.

Can HPV be prevented?

Yes. Infection from as many as nine HPV types can be prevented by vaccination.

What HPV vaccines are currently available?

A vaccine is available that can prevent infection with HPV. The vaccine protects against the HPV types that are the most common cause of cancer, precancer, and genital warts. Talk to your obstetrician–gynecologist or other health care provider about the HPV vaccine for you or your child today.

Who should be vaccinated?

The ideal age for HPV vaccination is age 11–12 years in boys and girls. However, the vaccine can be given to children as young as age 9 years. Boys and girls who did not get vaccinated at age 11–12 years can be vaccinated as part of the catch-up age group, from age 13 years through 26 years.

Why is HPV vaccination also recommended for boys?

Boys can get HPV-associated infections of the penis, anus, mouth, and throat. Each year, more than 10,000 men in the United States receive a diagnosis of an HPV-related cancer. No effective screening tests exist for anal cancer or throat cancer. Also, males who receive the HPV vaccine are less likely to infect future sexual partners.

Why is HPV vaccination recommended at such young ages?

The HPV vaccine prevents infection but cannot treat infection. It works best if given before exposure to HPV infection, which occurs with sexual activity. It is best to get the vaccine at your or your child's routine

(see reverse)

health care visit. The best age for HPV vaccination is age 11–12 years for girls and boys. Compared with older adolescents and young adults, children between age 11–12 years have a stronger response to the vaccine. This may result in longer-lasting immunity. People who have had sex already may be infected with one or more types of HPV, but they can still get the vaccine through age 26 years. They may benefit because they are unlikely to have been infected with all HPV types that are prevented by the vaccine.

What is the recommended timing of the HPV vaccine doses?

Boys and girls should get the HPV vaccine as a series of shots. For those aged 9–14 years, two shots of vaccine are recommended. The second shot should be given 6–12 months after the first one. For those aged 15–26 years, three shots are recommended. The first two shots should be given 1–2 months apart. The third shot should be given about 6 months after the first shot.

If I am late for my second or third dose, do I have to start the series over?

No. Starting over is not necessary. Get the next shot that is due. Complete all shots, even if the time between them is longer than recommended.

Can women older than 26 years be vaccinated against HPV?

At this time, HPV vaccination is only recommended for people aged 9–26 years. The vaccine works best if given before exposure to HPV through sexual activity. Vaccination is not harmful if given after age 26 years, but it may not be as effective.

Will vaccinating my daughter against HPV encourage her to become sexually active sooner?

No. Studies show that HPV vaccination has not been linked to girls having an earlier start to sexual activity or more sexual activity.

Are the HPV vaccines safe?

Yes. Studies show that the vaccines are very safe and effective. They do not contain live viruses, so they cannot cause an HPV infection. Millions of people around the world have been vaccinated without serious adverse effects. Since the first vaccine was licensed, 0.0003% of patients reported adverse effects, and most of those were nonserious symptoms such as pain at the injection site, headache, nausea, and dizziness. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention continues to closely monitor the vaccine and its safety.

Does the HPV vaccine work?

Yes. The HPV vaccine is highly effective when given before the start of sexual activity. The vaccine can reduce the risk of genital warts and HPV-related cancer and precancer by up to 99% after all recommended shots have been given. Clinical trials and ongoing research have shown that the vaccine provides protection for at least 10 years. There is no evidence to suggest this level of protection changes over time.

RESOURCES

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Immunization for Women

www.immunizationforwomen.org

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Committee Opinion No. 704, *Human Papillomavirus Vaccination*

For More Information: The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists has identified additional resources on topics related to this document that may be helpful for ob-gyns, other health care providers, and patients. You may view these resources at: www.acog.org/More-Info/HPV.

These resources are for information only and are not meant to be comprehensive. Referral to these resources does not imply the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists' endorsement of the organization, the organization's website, or the content of the resource. The resources may change without notice.

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The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 409 12th Street SW, PO Box 96920, Washington, DC 20090-6920