

CERVICAL CANCER VACCINE

What You Need to Know!



Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

Genital human papilloma virus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. HPV is passed through skin-to-skin contact with the genital area, most often during sexual activity. Studies show that 50-80% of sexually active women will become infected with HPV at some point during their lives.

There are several different kinds of HPV. Some types are associated with cancer, others cause warts, and others are thought to do nothing at all. Most HPV infections don't cause any symptoms, and go away on their own. But an HPV infection that persists over time can cause cervical cancer in women.

There is no treatment for HPV infection, but the conditions it causes can be treated.

Why get vaccinated?

The vaccine protects against two types of the HPV virus that cause about 70% of cervical cancers. Because there are other types of HPV that can cause cancer, women still need to get regular Pap tests, which check for cervical cancer. Some vaccines also protect against two types of HPV that cause 90% of genital warts.

WHO SHOULD GET VACCINATED AND WHEN?

Routine vaccination is recommended for girls aged 11-12. The vaccine is also approved for girls and women aged 9-26. It is given as a series of three shots over 6 months. It is important to get all three doses of the series.

WHY IS THE VACCINE GIVEN AT SUCH A YOUNG AGE?

The best way to ensure that you won't become infected with these viruses is by getting vaccinated before you are exposed to them. Since most people are exposed to the virus through sexual contact, getting the vaccine before the onset of sexual activity is recommended.

I'M ALREADY SEXUALLY ACTIVE – SHOULD I STILL GET THE VACCINE?

Yes! We don't have a way to prove if you have already been exposed to the types of HPV covered in the vaccine, so we recommend that all women aged 9-26 should get vaccinated.

I'VE ALREADY HAD AN HPV INFECTION – SHOULD I GET THE VACCINE?

Absolutely! Because the cervical cancer vaccine protects against several different types of HPV, and we don't currently have the ability to test specifically which type of HPV you have, we are recommending vaccination for all girls and women aged 9-26.

How else can I protect myself?

Abstinence is the best way to protect yourself from any sexually transmitted infection. For those who choose to be sexually active, consistent condom use and limiting the number of sexual partners you have are also important ways to decrease the likelihood of getting HPV.

DO I STILL NEED REGULAR PAP TESTS?

Yes! The cervical cancer vaccine only protects against two of the cancer-causing viruses. You can still get an HPV infection that could cause cancer. Even if you get the cervical cancer vaccine, we still recommend regular Pap tests. Ask your health care provider for more information.

HOW ELSE CAN I PROTECT MYSELF FROM CERVICAL CANCER?

Regular Pap tests are still an essential part of cancer prevention. Not smoking is also important because cigarette smoking is associated with both persistent HPV infections and cervical cancer.

For more information about HPV, cervical cancer, and the cervical cancer vaccine:

■ **CONTACT YOUR HEALTH CARE PROVIDER**

■ **IN NEW YORK CITY CALL 311 FOR MORE INFORMATION**

or go to www.nyc.gov/html/doh/html/imm/imm-hpv.shtml

Other sources of information:

NEW YORK STATE DEPT OF HEALTH

www.nyhealth.gov/prevention/immunization/human_papillomavirus/

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/default.htm

Toll-free voice information: 888-232-3228

CDC STI Hotline: 800-227-8922

AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY 1-800-ACS-2345

www.cancer.org

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