

Minnesota Department of Health

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine: What You Should Know

What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

Human papillomavirus is a common virus that infects the skin, particularly the genital area.

There are over 100 types of human papillomaviruses, and about 40 of them are spread through sexual contact. HPV types are categorized either high risk (those that might lead to cancer) and low risk (those that do not lead to cancer).

How common is HPV in the United States?

HPV infections are very common. Right now about 20 million people in the U.S. have HPV and over 6 million more are newly infected each year – mostly people who are in their late teens and early 20s. Many people get infected with more than one type of HPV.

What are the symptoms?

Most of the time there are no symptoms and most HPV infections go away on their own.

Some HPV types (the high risk ones) will cause an ongoing (chronic) infection in the cervix of a female. This causes abnormal Pap smears. Chronic HPV infection can lead to cancer, especially cervical cancer. The only way to know if you have a chronic infection is by having regular Pap smears.

HPV can cause genital warts, which can be uncomfortable and irritating and can reoccur. Sometimes genital warts spread to a baby during birth and infect the baby's lungs and airway.

How common is cervical cancer?

Annual Pap smears have been highly successful in reducing cervical cancer in the United States.

However, about 12,000 cases of cervical cancer occur as the result of chronic HPV infection, and about 3700 women die of cervical cancer in the U.S. each year. In Minnesota, about 175 women are diagnosed with this disease each year and about 50 die. HPV can also cause other types of cancer including cancer of the penis, vagina, vulva, or anus.

How do you prevent HPV infections?

Not having sex is the surest way to prevent HPV infections. Reducing the number of sexual partners and using condoms will reduce the risk of getting an HPV infection, but may not entirely prevent infection.

There is a HPV vaccine that protects against the HPV types that cause about 70 percent of cervical cancer and about 90 percent of genital warts. So getting the HPV vaccine will prevent HPV infection for two of the highest risk types of HPV. To get this protection, you need a series of three HPV shots, given in the arm.

HPV vaccine is very good at protecting young women against the most common types of HPV that cause cervical cancer and genital warts.

Does the HPV vaccine work?

Yes, it is very good at protecting young women against the most common types of HPV that cause cervical, vaginal, and vulvar cancer and genital warts. But the vaccine does not protect against every type of HPV, and it does not help treat a person who already has an HPV infection.



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1-800-657-3970
651-201-5503
www.health.state.mn.us/immunize

HPV Vaccine: What You Should Know – page 2

With the vaccine are Pap smears still necessary?

Yes. It is still very important for all women to get regular Pap smears - even after they get an HPV vaccination. Pap smears save lives. The vaccine only protects against two types of HPV that cause cancer. Pap smears detect infections from other HPV types.

Is HPV vaccine safe?

Yes. The vaccine was tested in thousands of women and serious reactions were very rare. The most common complaint was that the vaccine stings. Some women experienced soreness and swelling where the shot was given.

Fainting and dizziness sometimes occurs in adolescent girls with this vaccine. However, fainting is not uncommon among adolescents when they receive other shots.

Who should get the HPV vaccine?

Young girls should get HPV vaccine when they come in for their preteen health care visit at age 11-12 years. It is also recommended for females ages 13 through 26 years who haven't yet been vaccinated.

Scientists are still studying whether the vaccine works in males and is safe to give to them.

Can I get free or low cost HPV shots?

Yes, if you don't have insurance or your insurance does not cover the cost of HPV vaccination, you may be able to find free or low cost HPV shots.

- Talk to your doctor or clinic. If the person in need of vaccination is 18 years old or younger, they may be eligible for the Minnesota Vaccines for Children program. This program covers the cost of the vaccine; however, the parent may have to pay an administration fee of up to \$14.69 per shot.

- Call Merck, the company that makes HPV vaccine. If the person who needs vaccination is 19-26 years old, Merck has a program to help cover the costs. Call them at 1-800-261-5579 or go to their website at <http://www.merckvaccines.com/> and click on Adult Immunization Program.
- Talk to your city or county health department. They may be able to offer free or low cost HPV shots.

Where can I find more information about HPV?

- Minnesota Department of Health: www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/dtopics/vpds/hpv/index.html
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/default.htm; click on Human Papillomavirus.
- Immunization Action Coalition: www.immunize.org/HPV/
- Vaccine Education Center: <http://vaccine.chop.edu/>