



HPV/HPV Vaccine Facts

What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus, or HPV, is a virus that infects the genital area and the cervix. There are about 40 types of HPV that can cause genital warts in both males and females. HPV is also related to diseases of the penis, vulva, vagina, mouth, and throat that may turn to cancer.

How common is HPV?

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the U.S. and around the world. An estimated 20 million Americans are infected with HPV. Each year an estimated 6.2 million new cases are diagnosed. Nearly 75 percent of those newly infected are between the ages of 15 and 24. Seventy-five percent of all sexually active people will acquire HPV in their lifetime.

How do you get or spread HPV?

- Anal, vaginal or oral sex.
- Skin-to-skin contact in the genital area.

Remember that using a condom can reduce the risk of HPV, but you can still get or spread HPV through skin-to-skin contact in areas not covered by the condom. *Intercourse is not necessary to spread HPV.*

Is HPV dangerous?

Yes, it can be. Most (90%) people get rid of the virus on their own within two years, but can become infected with the same or a new type if re-exposed. HPV infection usually shows no symptoms, and causes no health problems (however, a person can spread the disease without knowing it). But sometimes, HPV infection stays in the body and can cause genital warts in males and females. In females, HPV that persists can also cause cervical dysplasia (abnormal cells in the lining of the cervix). If these abnormalities are not diagnosed early (usually by a pap smear) and treated, they can lead to cervical cancer. It is important for females to follow the recommended schedule for routine pap smears, even if they have received the HPV vaccine. HPV can also cause vaginal and vulvar cancers in females, penile cancer in males, and anal and oral cancers in both females and males.

How common is cervical cancer?

The American Cancer Society estimates that more than 11,000 women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer in the next year and about 3,700 will die from it. Worldwide, cervical cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths among women.

Is there a vaccine to prevent HPV?

Yes. Not having sex is the best way to prevent HPV. The HPV vaccine was approved in 2006 by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). It is also recommended by a federal advisory committee to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The vaccine was tested in about 21,000 girls and young women. It was found to be nearly 100 percent effective in preventing HPV infection in young women who received the vaccine before being exposed to the HPV types in the vaccine.

Who should get the HPV vaccine?

The vaccine may be given to females 9-26 years old. However, it is recommended by the Advisory Committee for Immunization Practices (ACIP) for girls 11 to 12 years old. Girls in this age group show the best immune response to the vaccine. The vaccine works best when received before a young woman becomes sexually active and exposed to the virus. The vaccine may be approved in the near future for boys and men of the same age group.

How does the HPV vaccine work?

The vaccine protects against the four most common high-risk types of HPV. Two types (6,11) cause 90 % of genital warts and two types (16,18) cause 70 % of cervical pre-cancer and cancer cases. The vaccine is given in a three-dose series, within a six month period. It may be given at the same time as other vaccines. Protection is expected to be long-lasting. Remember,

even if you get the vaccine, you should continue with regular pap smears and other cervical cancer screenings. The vaccine does not protect against HPV types you may have already been exposed to. It does not treat existing HPV infection. The vaccine does not protect against other sexually transmitted infections not caused by HPV.

Are there any side effects of the HPV vaccine?

The most common side effects seen with the shot are irritation, soreness and bruising at the injection site. This usually goes away within 24 hours. Fainting has been reported following vaccination, which is usually related to the shot itself and not the vaccine. Because falling with fainting can lead to other serious, sometimes traumatic injuries, proper precautions must be taken to avoid injury if fainting or falling occurs. The Health Department will follow the CDC recommendation that patients remain seated and be observed for 10-15 minutes after receiving the vaccine in order to minimize the risks of falling. Rare but serious conditions that have been reported in girls following vaccination are allergic reactions, seizures, deep vein blood clots, temporary paralysis, and Guillain-Barre Syndrome (a rare neurological condition). There is no evidence that the vaccine causes these conditions and someone receiving the vaccine is no more likely to get deep vein blood clots or Guillain-Barre Syndrome over those who do not get the vaccine. As recently as August 2009, amid the release of a report raising concerns about the HPV vaccine, the FDA and CDC stated that they “*continue to find that the HPV vaccine is a safe and effective vaccine that will potentially benefit the health of millions of women by providing protection against the types of HPV that cause the majority of cervical cancer...and its benefits continue to outweigh its risks.*” As with all vaccines, the safety and efficacy of this vaccine will continue to be closely monitored. Studies are also on-going to determine whether a “booster” vaccine will be needed after a certain number of years to maintain immunity, however, at this time, 8-year studies are showing that a booster is not yet needed.

Another HPV vaccine, Cervarix, is expected to be FDA-approved and become ACIP-recommended, as well, within the next year. Educational information and research findings should be made available to the public at that time.

Are there girls or young women who should not get the HPV vaccine?

Yes. The vaccine is not recommended if you are pregnant. It is also not recommended if you’ve ever had a life-threatening allergic reaction to yeast or to any other component of the HPV vaccine.

Is the HPV vaccine recommended for boys?

Not at this time. However, FDA approval is expected at any time for boys. After approval, it is likely that the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices will recommend the vaccine for boys. Boys and men can get genital warts, oral, penile, and rectal cancers that are caused by HPV.

The National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program

A federal program exists to help pay for the care of anyone who has a serious reaction to any vaccine. For more information about the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program, call 1.800.338.2383, or visit their website at www.hrsa.gov/vaccinecompensation.

Where can I get more information?

National STD Hotline: 1-800-227-8922

Spanish-Speaking: 1-800-344-7432

Hearing-Impaired: 1-800-243-7889

<http://www.co.guilford.nc.us/publichealth/>

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/hpv/default.htm>

<http://www.fda.gov/BiologicsBloodVaccines/SafetyAvailability/VaccineSafety/ucm179549.htm>

Guilford County Department of Public Health
Greensboro or High Point: 641-7777

SOURCES: American Cancer Society, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, The Vaccine Education Center at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia.

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