

# (HPV) - Get Vaccinated!

## *What is HPV?*

HPV (human papillomavirus) is a common virus that is spread from one person to another by skin-to-skin contact in the genital area. HPV can be spread even if there is no sexual intercourse.

Human papillomavirus is the name of a group of viruses that includes more than 100 different strains or types. More than 30 of these viruses are sexually transmitted, and they can infect the genital area of men and women. Some types of HPV can cause cervical cancer in women. Other types of HPV can cause genital warts.

Many sexually active people (at least 50 percent) get HPV at some time in their lives, although most never know it because HPV usually has no symptoms and goes away on its own. However, while a person is infected with HPV, they can spread the virus to other sex partners. HPV is most common in young women and men who are in their late teens and early 20s.

## *How do you get HPV?*

HPV is spread through any type of sexual activity and can infect any person who is sexually active. Both males and females can get it and pass it on to their sex partners without even realizing it.

## *What are the signs and symptoms of HPV infection?*

The virus lives in the body and usually causes no symptoms. Some people will develop visible growths or bumps in the genital area (genital warts), but most men and women who have HPV do not know they are infected.

## *How is HPV related to cancer?*

Some types of HPV can infect a woman's cervix (lower part of womb) and cause the cells to change. Most of the time, HPV goes away on its own. When HPV is gone, the cervix cells go back to normal. But sometimes, HPV does not go away. Instead, it stays in the body and continues to change the cells on a woman's cervix. These cervical cell changes (also called cervical dysplasia) can lead to cancer over time, if they are not treated. HPV can also cause other types of cancer, such as vulvar, vaginal, penile, anal, and oropharyngeal (cancers of the back of throat including base of tongue and tonsils).



## *How can my child be protected from getting HPV?*

The only sure protection from HPV is lifelong abstinence or a monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner. However, vaccines are now available that can protect females and males (ages 9 to 26) from some of the major types of HPV.

## *Does the HPV vaccine prevent all types of human papillomavirus?*

No, but the HPV vaccine can prevent most cases of cervical cancer and/or most genital warts. There are currently two HPV vaccines in the United States:

- The quadrivalent HPV vaccine (Gardasil) – which protects against the four types of HPV that cause most cervical and anal cancers and genital warts. This vaccine is available for males and females.
- The bivalent HPV vaccine (Cervarix) – which protects against the types of HPV that cause most cervical cancers. This vaccine is only available for females at this time.

## *Who should get the HPV vaccine?*

Both of the HPV vaccines licensed are safe and effective for females ages 9 through 26 years. CDC recommends that the following individuals receive the HPV vaccine:

- Routine vaccination is recommended for 11 and 12 year old girls and boys. The vaccines can also be started as early as age 9.
- The vaccine is also recommended for males and females 13-26 years of age who did not receive it when they were younger.

### *Why is HPV vaccine recommended for such young girls and boys?*

For the HPV vaccine to work best, it is very important to get all three doses (shots) before being exposed to HPV. Someone can be infected with HPV the very first time they have sexual contact with another person. It is also possible to get HPV even if sexual contact only happens one time. Ideally, males and females should get the vaccine before they even consider becoming sexually active.

### *How is the vaccine given?*

The vaccine is given as a series of three shots over six months. The best protection is achieved after all three shots are given.

### *Is the vaccine safe and effective?*

**Yes.** Studies show that the vaccine is extremely safe. The most common side effects are redness and soreness where the shot was given. Recipients should also be aware of reports of fainting directly after receiving the vaccine. The CDC recommends patients wait 15 to 30 minutes after receiving the vaccine before leaving the office. Studies have also found the vaccine to be almost 100 percent effective in preventing diseases (such as cervical cancer and genital warts) caused by the HPV types covered by the vaccine.

### *Do men and women who have received the HPV vaccine still need to worry about sexually transmitted infections?*

**Yes.** When vaccinated girls are older, they will still need to get regular Pap tests since the vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that cause cervical cancer nor does it protect against other sexually transmitted infections.

### *How much does the vaccine cost?*

The vaccine can be very expensive, around \$390 for all three injections. However, if your child is insured, the insurance may cover the costs. If your child is 18 years of age or younger and meets one of the following qualifications, he or she is eligible to receive the vaccine from the state at no cost:

- Is eligible for Medicaid,
- Has no health insurance,
- Is Native American or Alaskan Native, or
- Has health insurance, but it does not cover any of the vaccine cost.

### *What if my child is uninsured? How can I get help paying for vaccine administration fees and other health care services my child needs?*

Your child may be eligible for Health Check/ Medicaid or NC Health Choice – free or low cost health insurance for children and teens. Even children in a family of four with working parents may qualify. Both programs offer a rich package of benefits. If you are uninsured, apply through your local department of social services to find out if you qualify. To learn more about these child health insurance programs, go to **www.NCHealthyStart.org**.

### *What can I do?*

If you would like to have your child vaccinated, please contact your doctor, health care provider or local health department to schedule an appointment.

Contact your insurance company to determine if they will cover the cost of the vaccine. If you are uninsured, apply through your local department of social services to find out if you qualify for Health Check / NC Health Choice insurance.

For more information about HPV, please contact the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) at:

- **1-800-232-4636 (1-800-CDC-INFO);**
- **www.cdc.gov/std/hpv**  
and **www.cdc.gov/vaccines;**

or visit the NC Immunization Branch's website at **www.immunize.nc.gov**.

