

Frequently Asked Questions

What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

Human papillomavirus (pap-ah-LO-mah-VYE-rus) (HPV) is a common virus that is passed from one person to another through direct skin-to-skin contact during any type of sexual activity. There are more than 40 HPV types that can infect the genital areas of males and females. Most HPV types cause no symptoms and go away on their own. But some types can cause cervical cancer in women and other less common cancers — like cancers of the anus, penis, vagina, and vulva and oropharynx. Every year in the United States, HPV causes 30,700 cancers in men and women.

How common is HPV?

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. At least half of sexually active people will get HPV at some point in their lives. Most people never know that they have been infected and may give HPV to a sex partner without knowing it. About 79 million Americans are currently infected with some type of HPV. About 14 million people in the United States become newly infected each year. HPV is most common in people in their late teens and early 20s.

How can HPV be prevented?

The HPV vaccine protects against most genital warts and HPV-associated cancers, such as cervical cancers in females.

Who should get the HPV vaccine?

The CDC and the NJDOH recommend the HPV vaccine for all 11-12 year old girls and boys. The vaccination series can be started as early as 9 years. The vaccine is also recommended for 13-26 year old females and 13-21 year-old males who have not yet received or completed the full series of shots. It may be considered for males 22-26 years.

The vaccine should also be considered for the following people if they were not vaccinated when they were younger: young men who have sex with men, including young men who identify as gay or bisexual or who intend to have sex with men through age 26; young adults who are transgender through age 26; and young adults with certain immunocompromising conditions (including HIV) through age 26.

How is the HPV vaccine administered?

If started *before* age 15, the HPV vaccine series is given in two doses. The second dose should be given 6-12 months after the first dose. Teens and young adults who start the series later, at ages 15 through 26 years, need three doses of HPV vaccine to protect against cancer-causing HPV infection.

What are side effects of the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine does not appear to have serious side effects. Common side effects may include pain, redness, swelling or itching at the injection site, headache, and nausea.

Who should not get the HPV vaccine?

People who have had a severe allergic reaction to any component of HPV vaccine, or to an earlier dose of HPV vaccine should not get the HPV vaccine. People who are moderately or severely ill should wait until they recover before getting the vaccine. Pregnant girls/women should not get the vaccine. If a girl/woman finds out that she is pregnant after she has started the vaccine series, she should wait until after her pregnancy before finishing the vaccine series. Pregnancy testing is not needed before vaccination. If a vaccine dose has been administered during pregnancy, no intervention is needed.

How well does HPV vaccine work?

HPV vaccines work extremely well. The vaccine targets the HPV types that most commonly cause cervical cancer and can cause some cancers of the vulva, vagina, anus, and oropharynx. Clinical trials showed HPV vaccines provide close to 100% protection against cervical precancers and genital warts. Since the first HPV vaccine was recommended in 2006, there has been a 64% reduction in vaccine-type HPV infections among teen girls in the United States. Studies have shown that fewer teens are getting genital warts and cervical precancers are decreasing.

Does the vaccine protect against all types of HPV?

The vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV and it will not prevent all cases of cervical cancer, anal cancer, oropharyngeal cancers, or genital warts. The HPV vaccine does not treat existing HPV infections or HPV-associated diseases. It is important to continue getting screened for cancers (e.g., regular Pap tests).

Is the HPV vaccine safe?

The United States currently has the safest, most effective vaccine supply in history. Years of testing are required by law to ensure the safety of vaccines before they are made available for use in the United States. Once the vaccine is in use, CDC and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) monitor any associated side effects or possible side effects (adverse events) through the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) and other vaccine safety systems.

Where can I get more information?

- Your healthcare provider
- Your local health department: <http://localhealth.nj.gov>
- New Jersey Department of Health website: <http://nj.gov/health/cd>
- Protect Me With 3+: www.protectmewith3.com
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention HPV website: www.cdc.gov/hpv
- CDC-INFO Contact Center at:
 - English and Spanish (800) CDC-INFO
 - TTY: (888) 232-6348

This information is intended for educational purposes only and is not intended to replace consultation with a healthcare professional.