

Human Papillomavirus (HPV): Questions and Answers



INFORMATION ABOUT THE DISEASE AND VACCINES

How common is HPV in the United States?

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. About 79 million Americans are currently infected with HPV. About 14 million people become newly infected each year. HPV is so common that most sexually active men and women will get at least one type of HPV at some point in their lives.

An estimated 37,000 cancers attributed to HPV occur annually in the U.S., including an estimated 16,000 HPV-attributed cancers in males. Of the HPV-attributed cancer, approximately 64% are caused by high-risk HPV types 16 and 18, which are included in all three HPV vaccines that have been available in the United States and about 12% are caused by the additional 5 HPV types included in Gardasil 9.

How does HPV spread?

HPV is spread through contact with infected skin, usually through sexual contact. Most infected people have no symptoms and are unaware they are infected and can transmit the virus to a sex partner. Rarely, a pregnant woman passes HPV to her baby during vaginal delivery.

What are the symptoms of HPV?

Most people who become infected with HPV have no symptoms. Some HPV-infected people develop visible genital warts, or have pre-cancerous changes in the cervix, vulva, anus, or penis.

Genital warts usually appear as soft, moist, pink, or flesh-colored swellings, usually in the genital area. They can be raised or flat, single or multiple, small or large, and sometimes cauliflower shaped. They can appear on the vulva, in or around the vagina or anus, on the cervix, and on the penis, scrotum, groin, or thigh. After sexual contact with an infected person, warts may appear within weeks or months, or not at all.

How serious is HPV?

Most HPV infections don't cause any symptoms and eventually go away, as the body's own defense system clears the virus. Women with short-term HPV infections may develop mild Pap test abnormalities that go away with time.

A small percentage of people infected with HPV develop persistent (chronic) HPV infection. Women with persistent high-risk HPV infections are at greatest risk for developing cervical cancer precursor lesions (abnormal cells on the lining of the cervix) and cervical cancer.

What are possible complications from HPV?

Cancer is the most serious possible complication from HPV infection. Persistent infection with high-risk types of HPV is associated with almost all cervical cancers.

Persistent infection with high-risk types of HPV is also associated with cancers of the vulva, vagina, penis, anus and back of the throat. Occasionally, low-risk HPV infections can be transmitted during birth, resulting in respiratory tract warts in infants and children.

How is HPV infection diagnosed?

Genital warts in men and women are diagnosed by visual inspection.

Cervical pre-cancer and cancer screening for women is done on the basis of an abnormal Pap test and/or a specific DNA test to detect the presence of HPV. Cervical cancer screening recommendations vary by age and medical history and should be discussed with a healthcare professional.

No HPV tests are available for men.

Can genital HPV infection be cured?

There is no cure for HPV infection, although the immune system usually eliminates the virus from the body. Approximately 90% of women with HPV infection become HPV-negative within two years. However, a small percentage of infected people remain infected for many years, which may result in genital warts or cancer.

There are treatments for the health problems that HPV can cause, such as genital warts, cervical cell changes, and cancers of the cervix, vulva, vagina, penis, anus, and throat. If you have one of these conditions, your healthcare provider can discuss treatment options with you.

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Visible genital warts can be removed by medications the patient applies, or by treatments performed by a healthcare provider. No one treatment is best. Warts might return, especially in the first 3 months after treatment. It is not known whether treatment of genital warts will reduce the chance of passing the virus on to a sex partner. If left untreated, genital warts may go away, remain unchanged, or increase in size or number.

How can people reduce their risk for acquiring genital HPV infection?

The surest way to eliminate risk for genital HPV infection is to refrain from any genital contact with another individual.

For people who have had any sexual contact, a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner is the strategy most likely to prevent future genital HPV infections. However, it is difficult to determine whether a partner is currently infected.

It is not known how much protection a condom provides against HPV, since skin that is not covered by a condom can be exposed to the virus. However, condoms may reduce the risk of genital warts and cervical cancer. People can reliably also reduce their risk by getting the HPV vaccine.

When were the HPV vaccines licensed?

The first HPV vaccine (Gardasil, Merck) was licensed for females in 2006. Gardasil protected against four HPV types: 16, 18, 6, and 11. HPV types 16 and 18 cause most cervical cancer, and types 6 and 11 cause most genital warts. In 2009, Gardasil was licensed for use in males. In 2009, a second HPV vaccine was licensed (Cervarix, GSK) for use in females. Cervarix protected against HPV types 16 and 18. In 2014, a new version of Gardasil was licensed. This vaccine, called Gardasil 9, protects against the four HPV types included in the original Gardasil as well as 5 additional cancer-causing HPV types. As of late 2016, only Gardasil 9 is distributed in the United States.

What kind of vaccine is it?

HPV vaccine is an inactivated (not live) vaccine.

How is this vaccine given?

This vaccine is given as an injection in the deltoid muscle of the arm.

What are the recommendations for use of HPV vaccine in people age 9 through 26 years?

ACIP recommends HPV vaccination of all children at age 11 or 12 years so the 2-dose series is complete before age 13; vaccination may begin at age 9 if preferred. Vaccination is also recommended for all people age 13 through 26 years who have not been vaccinated previously or who have not completed the vaccination series.

What are the recommendations for use of HPV vaccine in people age 27 through 45 years?

Catch-up HPV vaccination is not recommended for all adults older than 26 years of age. Instead, shared clinical decision-making regarding HPV vaccination is recommended for some adults age 27 through 45 years who are not vaccinated.

Ideally, HPV vaccine should be administered before potential exposure to HPV through sexual contact.

Why is shared clinical decision-making (a discussion between the provider and the patient) recommended to determine whether to provide HPV vaccine to an adult age 27 through 45 years?

Although new HPV infections are most commonly acquired in adolescence and young adulthood, at any age, having a new sex partner is a risk factor for acquiring a new HPV infection. In addition, some people have specific behavioral or medical risk factors for HPV infection or disease, including men who have sex with men, transgender people and people with immunocompromising conditions. HPV vaccine works to prevent infection in a person who has not been exposed to vaccine-type HPV before vaccination. A discussion with a healthcare provider is the best way to decide together how much a person may benefit from HPV vaccination to prevent new HPV infections.

How many doses are needed and on what schedule?

The schedule for HPV vaccine depends on the age at which the first dose is given. For people with a normal immune system who received the first dose of HPV vaccine before age 15 years, the recommended schedule is 2 doses, separated by 6 to 12 months. If the first dose is given at age 15 years or older, a 3-dose schedule is required. For the 3-dose series, dose 2 should be given 1 to 2 months after dose 1 and dose 3 should be given at least 6 months after dose 1 and at least 12 weeks after dose 2. The vaccine can be administered at

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the same visit as other needed vaccines. Individuals with certain immunocompromising conditions (e.g., cancer, HIV, taking immunosuppressive drugs) should follow the 3-dose schedule, regardless of age at the time of dose 1.

The vaccine provides the best protection when given before onset of sexual activity. However, people who are sexually active also may benefit from vaccination. People who have not been infected with any vaccine HPV type would receive the full benefit of vaccination. Those who already have been infected with one or more HPV types would still get protection from the vaccine types they have not acquired. HPV vaccine can be given to people who have had an abnormal Pap test or genital warts. However, the vaccine is not a treatment for existing HPV infection or HPV-related disease.

Should individuals be screened for HPV infection before getting vaccinated?

No. Evidence of an existing HPV infection is not a factor in determining the need for HPV vaccination. Though vaccination cannot treat or cure an existing infection, it can prevent infections with other HPV types included in the vaccine.

How effective is the HPV vaccine?

HPV vaccine is highly effective in preventing infection with types of HPV included in the vaccines. Studies have shown the vaccine prevents nearly 100 percent of the precancerous cervical cell changes caused by the types of HPV included in the vaccine for more than 10 years after vaccination. Among males, efficacy of Gardasil for prevention of genital warts was 89% and efficacy for the prevention of precancerous lesions of the anus was 78%.

How long does vaccine protection last? Will a booster shot be needed?

Studies have shown people to still be protected following initial vaccination more than a decade earlier. More research is being done to find out if a booster dose will eventually be needed.

Who recommends HPV vaccine?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the American College

of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the American College of Nurse-Midwives, the American Academy of Physician Associates, and the National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners all recommend completion of HPV vaccination before age 13, beginning as early as age 9 years.

What side effects have been reported from HPV vaccine?

Mild problems may occur with HPV vaccine, including pain, redness, swelling, and itching at the injection site. These problems do not last long and go away on their own. Fainting has been reported among adolescents who receive HPV vaccine (and other recommended vaccines as well). It's best for the patient to sit during vaccine administration and remain seated for 15–20 minutes after receiving the vaccine.

Like all vaccines, HPV vaccine is monitored for more serious or unusual side effects.

Can HPV vaccine cause HPV?

No. HPV vaccines do not contain live viruses so they cannot cause infection or HPV disease.

We've heard stories about severe reactions to HPV vaccine. Is there any substance to these stories?

No. While serious events, including death and Guillain-Barré syndrome, have been reported among women who had recently received HPV vaccine, CDC and FDA follow-up on these reports has not found that the events occurred more frequently among vaccinees than among the general population, and has detected no pattern that would indicate an association with the vaccine. You can find complete information on HPV vaccine safety at www.cdc.gov/vaccine-safety/vaccines/hpv.html.

Do women still need to get a Pap test if they've been vaccinated against HPV?

Yes. Women should continue to receive regular cervical cancer screening for three reasons. First, the vaccine does not provide protection against all types of HPV that cause cervical cancer. Second, women may not receive the full benefits of the vaccine if they do not complete the vaccine series. Third, women may not receive the full benefits of the vaccine if they were infected with HPV before receiving the vaccine.

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In addition, vaccinated people should continue to practice protective sexual behaviors since the vaccine will not prevent all cases of genital warts or other sexually transmitted infections.

Does the vaccine protect against all types of HPV?

No. Although there are more than 100 types of human papillomaviruses, only 9 are included in Gardasil 9 (HPV 6, 11, 16, 18, 31, 33, 45, 52 and 58). These 9 types, however, cause slightly more than 90% of HPV-attributable cancers. HPV 16 and 18 (included in the current and the two previous vaccines) are responsible for 66% of cervical cancers; HPV 6 and 11 cause approximately 90% of genital warts.

What if a person doesn't get all of the recommended doses?

Protection from infection begins after one dose of HPV vaccine, but we do not know if one dose protects as well or as long as the recommended series in all age groups. For this reason, it is important to complete the recommended series. If there is a gap in the schedule longer than the recommended time, the series should be continued from where it left off – there is no need to restart the series.

Can an HPV vaccine series begun with Cervarix or Gardasil be completed with Gardasil 9?

Yes. Any HPV vaccine may be used to continue or complete the series.

Does CDC recommend revaccination with Gardasil 9 for people who previously received a series of Cervarix or Gardasil?

CDC does not recommend revaccination with Gardasil 9 for people who completed a series of another HPV vaccine.

My 12-year-old received the first 2 doses of the HPV series 2 months apart according to the 3-dose schedule. Is his HPV vaccine series complete or does he need a third dose?

Adolescents age 9 through 14 years who received 2 doses of HPV vaccine separated by less than 5 months should receive a third dose 6–12 months after dose #1 and at least 12 weeks after dose #2.

Do people whose sexual orientation is same-sex need HPV vaccine?

Yes. HPV vaccine is recommended when age-appropriate, regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation.

Who should NOT receive HPV vaccine?

Anyone who has ever had a life-threatening allergic reaction to any component of HPV vaccine (such as baker's yeast), or to a previous dose of HPV vaccine, should not get the vaccine.

HPV vaccine is not recommended during pregnancy. Though the vaccine appears to be safe during pregnancy, this issue is still being studied. Inadvertently receiving HPV vaccine during pregnancy is not a reason to consider terminating the pregnancy.

Breast-feeding is not a reason to delay HPV vaccination. People who have a moderate or severe acute illness should wait until their condition improves to be vaccinated.

Is HPV vaccine covered by insurance plans?

Almost all health insurance plans cover HPV vaccination when it is recommended. The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program provides free vaccines to children and adolescents younger than 19 years of age, who are Medicaid-eligible, American Indian, Alaska Native, uninsured, or receiving care in a Federally Qualified Health Clinic or Rural Health Center. If you're not certain about your healthcare coverage, contact your health insurance plan for further information. If you don't have health insurance or if your plan doesn't cover this vaccine, ask your healthcare provider, pharmacist, or local health department how you can obtain this vaccine.