

# (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%) 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 cervical 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.

## *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, a new vaccine can now protect females (ages 9 to 26) from four major types of HPV. These include two types that cause about 70% of cervical cancer and two types that cause about 90% of genital warts. **HPV vaccine can prevent most genital warts and most cases of cervical cancer.**

## *Who should get the HPV vaccine?*

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

## *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.



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

The vaccine is most effective in girls and young women who have not yet been exposed to HPV infection. Ideally, females should get the vaccine before they even consider becoming sexually active.

## *What about vaccination for boys and men?*

This question is being studied, but at this time the vaccine has been approved and recommended for girls and women only.

## *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% effective in preventing diseases (such as cervical cancer and genital warts) caused by the four HPV types covered by the vaccine.

## *Do young women who get the HPV vaccine still need to get Pap tests?*

**Yes.** When vaccinated girls are older, they will still need to get regular Pap tests within three years of becoming sexually active (or by age 21), since the vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that cause cervical cancer.

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

**Yes.** The HPV vaccine does not prevent other sexually transmitted infections such as syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia or herpes. Also, the vaccine doesn't protect against all HPV types.

## *How much does the vaccine cost?*

The vaccine is very expensive, around \$360 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, 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 fully cover the cost of vaccines.

## *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 with one or two working parents earning \$42,400 a year or more 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](http://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](http://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv)**  
and **[www.cdc.gov/vaccines](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines);**

or visit the NC Immunization Branch's website at **[www.immunizenc.com](http://www.immunizenc.com)**.

