

HPV vaccine fact sheet

What is HPV?

HPV stands for human papillomavirus. There are many different types of HPV.

Genital HPV is a very common sexually transmitted infection in men and women with around 80% being infected at some point in their lives. It usually causes no symptoms and goes away by itself, but can sometimes cause serious illness.

HPV-related cancers and disease

Genital HPV infection can cause cervical, vulva and vaginal cancer in women and penile cancer in men. It can also cause cancers of the anus and mouth/throat and genital warts in both men and women.

How do people get HPV?

HPV is passed on from one person to another through intimate genital-skin contact, usually without the person ever knowing it. The virus enters the body through tiny breaks in the skin.

Condoms offer some but not total protection from HPV, as they don't cover all of the genital skin. They do offer protection from many other sexually transmitted infections though, and help prevent unwanted pregnancy.

You can be exposed to HPV the first time sexual activity occurs, from only one sexual partner.

About the HPV vaccine

A vaccine has been developed that can give your child protection against four types of HPV (types 6, 11, 16 and 18) that cause over 70% of cervical cancers, most HPV-related penile cancers, a significant proportion of anal cancers, and 90% of genital warts.

As with any vaccine, the HPV vaccine may not fully protect everyone who is vaccinated and does not protect against all HPV types.

For people aged 14 and under, the vaccine is given as two injections in the upper arm six to 12 months apart, and works best if given before any sexual activity begins. It is expected to provide long lasting protection.

The vaccine cannot cause cancer or other HPV-related illness. The vaccine was carefully tested before it was introduced and over 270 million doses have been given safely around the world.

The National HPV Vaccination Program

Girls and boys aged 12–13 can receive the HPV vaccine in school free of charge as part of the National HPV Vaccination Programme.

This is the only time your child will be able to receive the vaccine conveniently through school. If your child misses a dose at school, your son or daughter will need to attend one of our community catch up clinics outside of school hours in order to receive the vaccine. In some cases, catch up doses are offered at the school.

Please note: boys will be eligible to receive this vaccine **in year 8 only**. There is no NHS provision for boys to receive the vaccine through school, or with their family doctor after year 8.

A consent form will be sent home from school, which must be signed by a parent or guardian and returned to school before students can be given the vaccine.

If you do not want your child to have the vaccine, you must note this on the form and still return it to school.

Why should I consider the HPV vaccine for my child?

Having the HPV vaccine means your child is far less likely to develop HPV-related cancers and disease in the future.

The vaccine works best when given at a younger age. Research shows that younger people create more antibodies to the vaccine than those aged in their late teens. This means if your child has the vaccine at age 12–13, he or she is better protected against HPV in the future.

If the vaccine is delayed until your son or daughter reaches the age of 15 or above, they will require **three** doses of vaccine to be fully protected, rather than two. Boys are only eligible to receive the HPV vaccine for free as part of the NHS school age vaccination programme in year 8.

If I decide my child should have the vaccine, am I sending the wrong message?

You are not endorsing or promoting sexual activity if you decide to vaccinate your child.

Having the HPV vaccine is the same as having any other vaccine – a preventative health choice for the future. It is a normal part of growing up, with the vast majority of children vaccinated at school.

Will my daughter still need Cervical Screening tests in the future if she has the vaccine?

Yes. The vaccine doesn't protect against all of the HPV types that can lead to cervical cancer, so your daughter will still need Cervical Screening Tests every five years from the age of 25, if she has ever been sexually active.

The World Health Organization fully endorse HPV vaccination programs as part of an integrated cervical cancer prevention strategy that includes regular cervical cancer screening for women and sexual health education.

More information:

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