

# HPV

also known as Human Papillomavirus

**As parents, you do everything you can to protect your children's health for now and for the future. Today, there is a strong weapon to prevent several types of cancer in our kids: the HPV vaccine.**

## HPV and Cancer

HPV is short for Human Papillomavirus, a common virus. In the United States each year, there are about 17,500 women and 9,300 men affected by HPV-related cancers. Many of these cancers **could be prevented with vaccination.** In both women and men, HPV can cause anal cancer and mouth/throat (oropharyngeal) cancer. It can also cause cancers of the cervix, vulva and vagina in women; and cancer of the penis in men.

For women, screening is available to detect most cases of cervical cancer with a Pap smear. Unfortunately, there is no routine screening for other HPV-related cancers for women or men, and these cancers can cause pain, suffering, or even death. **That is why a vaccine that prevents most of these types of cancers is so important.**

## More about HPV

HPV is a virus passed from one person to another during skin-to-skin sexual contact, including vaginal, oral, and anal sex. HPV is most common in people in their late teens and early 20s. Almost all sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives, though most will never even know it.

Most of the time, the body naturally fights off HPV, before HPV causes any health problems. But in some cases, the body does not fight off HPV, and HPV can cause health problems, like cancer and genital warts. Genital warts are not a life-threatening disease, but they can cause emotional stress, and their treatment can be very uncomfortable. About 1 in 100 sexually active adults in the United States have genital warts at any given time.

## HPV vaccination is recommended for preteen girls and boys at age 11 or 12 years

All preteens need HPV vaccination so they can be protected from HPV infections that cause cancer. Teens and young adults who didn't start or finish the HPV vaccine series also need HPV vaccination. Young women can get HPV vaccine until they are 27 years old and young men can get HPV vaccine until they are 22 years old. Young men who have sex with other men or who have weakened immune systems can also get HPV vaccine until they are 27.

HPV vaccination is a series of shots given over several months. The best way to remember to get your child all of the shots they need is to make an appointment for the remaining shots before you leave the doctor's office or clinic.

## Is the HPV vaccine safe?

Yes. HPV vaccination has been studied very carefully and continues to be monitored by CDC and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). No serious safety concerns have been linked to HPV vaccination. **These studies continue to show that HPV vaccines are safe.**

The most common side effects reported after HPV vaccination are mild. They include pain and redness in the area of the arm where the shot was given, fever, dizziness, and nausea. Some preteens and teens may faint after getting a shot or any other medical procedure. Sitting or lying down for about 15 minutes after getting shots can help prevent injuries that could happen if your child were to fall while fainting. ▶



## Why does my child need this now?

HPV vaccines offer the best protection to girls and boys who complete the series and have time to develop an immune response **before** they begin sexual activity with another person. This is not to say that your preteen is ready to have sex. In fact, it's just the opposite—it's important to get your child protected before you or your child have to think about this issue. The immune response to this vaccine is better in preteens, and this could mean better protection for your child. ❖

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Serious side effects from HPV vaccination are rare. Children with severe allergies to yeast or latex shouldn't get certain HPV vaccines. Be sure to tell the doctor or nurse if your child has any severe allergies.

## Help paying for vaccines

The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program provides vaccines for children ages 18 years and younger who are uninsured, Medicaid-eligible, or American Indian/Alaska Native. Learn more about the VFC program at [www.cdc.gov/Features/VFCprogram/](http://www.cdc.gov/Features/VFCprogram/)

Whether you have insurance, or your child is VFC-eligible, some doctors' offices may also charge a fee to give the vaccines. ■

### Jacquelyn's story: "I was healthy—and got cervical cancer."

When I was in my late 20's and early 30's, in the years before my daughter was born, I had some abnormal Pap smears and had to have further testing. I was told I had the kind of HPV that can cause cancer and mild dysplasia.

For three more years, I had normal tests. But when I got my first Pap test after my son was born, they told me I needed a biopsy. The results came back as cancer, and my doctor sent me to an oncologist. Fortunately, the cancer was at an early stage. My lymph nodes were clear, and I didn't need radiation. But I did need to have a total hysterectomy.

My husband and I have been together for 15 years, and we were planning to have more children. We are so grateful for our two wonderful children, but we were hoping for more—which is not going to happen now.

The bottom line is they caught the cancer early, but the complications continue to impact my life and my family. For the next few years, I have to get pelvic exams and Pap smears every few months, the doctors measure tumor markers, and I have to have regular x-rays and ultrasounds, just in case. I have so many medical appointments that are taking time away from my family, my friends, and my job.

**Worse, every time the phone rings, and I know it's my oncologist calling, I hold my breath until I get the results. I'm hopeful I can live a full and healthy life, but cancer is always in the back of my mind.**

In a short period of time, I went from being healthy and planning more children to all of a sudden having a radical hysterectomy and trying to make sure I don't have cancer again. It's kind of overwhelming. And I am one of the lucky ones!

Ultimately I need to make sure I'm healthy and there for my children. I want to be around to see their children grow up.

I will do everything to keep my son and daughter from going through this. I will get them both the HPV vaccine as soon as they turn 11. I tell everyone—my friends, my family—to get their children the HPV vaccine series to protect them from this kind of cancer. ❖



### What about boys?

HPV vaccine is for boys too! This vaccine can help prevent boys from getting infected with the types of HPV that can cause cancers of the mouth/throat, penis and anus. The vaccine can also help prevent genital warts. HPV vaccination of males is also likely to benefit females by reducing the spread of HPV viruses.

Learn more about HPV and HPV vaccine at [www.cdc.gov/hpv](http://www.cdc.gov/hpv)

For more information about the vaccines recommended for preteens and teens:

**800-CDC-INFO** (800-232-4636)  
[www.cdc.gov/vaccines/teens](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/teens)