

---

# Vaccine Against Genital Warts and Cervical Cancer

Human papillomavirus (HPV), the virus that causes genital warts, is one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). HPV infection can also cause problems with the cervix (the opening to the uterus located at the top of the vagina) that may lead to cervical cancer. It can also sometimes cause problems that may lead to cancer in other genital areas, such as the vagina or vulva.

Both girls and guys can get HPV from sexual contact, including vaginal, oral, and anal sex. Most people infected with HPV don't know it because they have no symptoms. People do not always develop genital warts when they are infected with the virus, but it's still in their system and it could be causing damage. With or without obvious signs like warts, people with HPV might not know they have it and can pass the infection to others.

Because HPV can cause serious problems such as genital warts and cervical cancer, a vaccine is an important step in preventing infection and protecting against the spread of HPV. In June 2006, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the vaccine, which is recommended to protect girls from getting cervical, vaginal, and vulvar cancer and genital warts.

In 2009 the FDA approved the vaccine for use in boys and men to prevent genital warts, although its use in males is optional and the decision to get it should be made with a person's doctor.

## How Does It Work?

The FDA approved the HPV vaccine as safe for females and males ages 9 to 26 years old. The vaccine is given as three injections over a 6-month period.

The vaccine does not protect people who have been infected with HPV before they've been vaccinated. So getting the vaccine before having sex for the first time is the most effective way for it to help prevent the infection. However, the vaccine doesn't protect against all types of HPV, so it's important for anyone having sex to get routine checkups and for girls to get Pap smears when a doctor recommends it.

The only way to be completely sure about preventing HPV infections and other STDs is not to have sex (called abstinence). For those who are having sex, condoms offer some protection against HPV. Condoms can't completely prevent infections because the warts can be outside the area covered by the condom (warts are not always clearly seen), and condoms can break.

---

The HPV vaccine is also not a replacement for using condoms to protect against other STDs when having sex.

Spermicidal foams, creams, and jellies have not been proved to protect against HPV or genital warts. If you have questions about the vaccine or are concerned about STDs, talk to your doctor.

## **Side Effects**

Most of the side effects that people get from the HPV vaccine are minor, such as swelling or pain at the site of the shot, or feeling faint after getting the vaccine. As with other vaccines, there is a small chance of an allergic reaction.

A few people have reported health problems after getting the shot. The FDA is monitoring the vaccine closely to make sure these are not caused by the vaccine itself.

Most people have no trouble with the vaccine. You can lessen your risk of side effects like fainting by sitting down for 15 minutes after each shot.

Reviewed by: Elana Pearl Ben-Joseph, MD

Date reviewed: January 2010

---



Note: All information is for educational purposes only. For specific medical advice, diagnoses, and treatment, consult your doctor.

© 1995- KidsHealth® All rights reserved.