Do HPV vaccines work as a treatment for those who already have HPV?

HPV vaccines are not designed to treat or cure existing HPV infections. The vaccine will not treat cases of cervical cell changes or genital warts.

Does HPV vaccination lead to an increase in sexual activity?

While some parents have expressed this concern, several studies have shown this not to be the case. While many studies relied upon self-reported behavior about sexual activity, a 2012 study published in the journal Pediatrics instead looked at medical data, including pregnancy, sexually transmitted infection testing or diagnosis, and contraceptive counseling as evidence of sexually activity. The researchers found that HPV vaccination at the recommended ages was not associated with increased sexual activity.

I want to get the vaccine. What do I do next?

Talk to your healthcare provider about the vaccine. If you don’t have a healthcare provider but want more information, contact your local health department.

The vast majority of health insurance plans report including most or all of the ACIP recommended vaccines in their benefits for children, adolescents and adults. For those that qualify, HPV vaccines are also available through the federal Vaccines for Children (VFC) program.

Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly, are effective at reducing the risk of transmission of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV, if the condom covers the affected area or site of potential exposure. To reduce risk of transmission of herpes, couples should abstain from sexual intercourse during an outbreak.

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What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common group of viruses that infect skin. Some types of HPV cause warts, like those found on hands. Other types are sexually transmitted and can infect the genital area. Genital HPV is passed by direct skin-to-skin contact. This includes vaginal and anal sex and genital-to-genital contact, even if there is no penetration.

Some types of genital HPV can lead to cervical cancer and are called “high-risk” types. Sometimes these high-risk types of HPV cause changes in the throat, vulva, vagina, anus, and penis, but cancers in these areas are not common. Other types of genital HPV, known as “low-risk” types, can cause genital warts. When warts do occur they are often fleshy, skin colored bumps, but they aren’t the same on everyone. A healthcare provider can usually diagnose warts with a visual exam.

What are HPV vaccines?

HPV vaccines help prevent infection with both high-risk HPV types that can lead to cancer and low risk types that cause genital warts. There are currently three HPV vaccines available:

- **Gardasil®** is vaccine available for both males and females. It is close to 100% effective at preventing infection associated with HPV types 6 and 11 (types associated with 90% of all genital warts) and types 16 and 18 (types associated with 70% of all cervical cancers, and many anal, vulvar and vaginal cancers).

- **Cervarix®** (GSK) is a vaccine just for women. This vaccine is also close to 100% effective at preventing infection associated with HPV types 16 and 18 (associated with 70% of all cervical cancers). Studies suggest Cervarix® also offers cross-protection against other “high-risk” HPV types.

- **Gardasil 9®** was approved in December 2014. The new vaccine covers nine HPV types: the two low-risk types that cause most cases of genital warts (HPV 6 and HPV 11) along with seven high-risk types (HPV 16, 18, 31, 33, 45, 52, and 58) found in a number of cancers, including about 90% of cervical cancers around the world as well as most anal, vulvar, and vaginal cancers.

Why are HPV vaccines needed?

- HPV is very common. Over 80% of sexually active people have it at some point in their lives. The infection is usually harmless and the body most often clears it in a short time, but some types can lead to cancer if untreated.

- **HPV can lead to cervical cancer.** In a few people, high-risk HPV and related cervical cell changes last for many years and can lead to cancer if they aren’t found. Being vaccinated against HPV can lower the chance a woman will develop cervical cancer.

- Some types of HPV can cause cancers of the penis, anus, or oropharynx (back of the throat including the base of the tongue and tonsils).

- **Low-risk types of HPV can cause genital warts.** These types of HPV that can cause genital warts are not the same as the types that can cause cancer. Genital warts may cause problems during pregnancy. Talk to your healthcare provider and do not use over-the-counter wart creams.

Who should get the vaccine?

Experts recommend that all females between the ages of 9 and 26 get an HPV vaccine. About half of all new infections are diagnosed in girls and young women between 15 and 24 years of age, so early vaccination is important. Males are at risk for HPV and related diseases, too, so boys and young men are also recommended to be vaccinated.

How safe and effective are HPV vaccines?

HPV vaccines have been used in many countries for several years, and they have proven to be safe and well-tolerated. There have been some mild to moderate reactions reported from people who have received the vaccines, the most common being pain, redness, and swelling around the injection site. Other mild reactions reported include fever, headache, fatigue, nausea and vomiting. Some people have experienced fainting as well.

Do females who receive the HPV vaccine still need to get regular Pap tests?

**YES!** HPV vaccines can protect against the HPV types found with most cases of cervical cancer, but there are other high-risk types the vaccines don’t cover. Even if a woman has been vaccinated against HPV, regular screening is still necessary. Pap and HPV tests save lives!

For women under 30, recommended screening is with a Pap test, which detects abnormal cell changes, once every three years. For women ages 30 to 65, co-testing with a Pap and HPV test every five years is preferred. HPV tests check directly for HPV.

Another option recently became available: one HPV test has been approved for use as primary cervical cancer screening for women age 25 and older, followed by a Pap test for women with certain results.