



The HPV Vaccine

What is the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine is a new series of vaccinations to protect against “high risk” genital HPV (human papillomavirus) infection with HPV types 16 and 18, which are known to cause 70% of abnormal Pap smears and cervical cancer. The first FDA approved vaccine is called Gardasil and also protects against “low risk” HPV types 6 and 11, which are known to cause 90% of condyloma or genital warts. It is currently estimated that an unvaccinated sexually active woman has an 80% chance of acquiring a genital HPV infection in her lifetime. An excellent source for further information on genital HPV infection is <http://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/>.

How is the HPV vaccine given and is the HPV vaccine safe?

This vaccine is given as a standard intramuscular injection in three doses at 0, 2, and 6 months. The vaccine is a synthetic viral protein product which does not contain live virus and is considered very safe.

Who should be given the HPV vaccine?

The Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) has recommended that this vaccine be given to all girls and women between the ages of 11 and 26 years. The vaccine is recommended even if you have already been diagnosed with genital warts or abnormal Pap smears in the past.

Who should not receive the HPV vaccine?

Girls less than 9 years of age and pregnant women are currently not recommended to receive the HPV vaccine. The safety of this vaccine in pregnancy has not been studied.

Do I need the vaccine if I always use condoms?

Yes. Since the HPV can live on many areas of the genital skin in both men and women, condoms are only 80% effective in preventing HPV infection. Condoms will prevent a much higher percentage of other infections such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, and HIV, and are still recommended even after you have completed the HPV vaccine.

How effective is the HPV vaccine?

Initial studies have demonstrated that the HPV vaccine is almost 100% effective in preventing new infections with HPV types 6, 11, 16, and 18 in up to 5 years of follow-up. It does not appear to be effective for treatment of existing genital warts or dysplasia of the cervix (abnormal Pap smears) but can be given to women with these conditions to protect against new infections. Because this vaccine does not protect against all of the types of genital HPV infection, you should still have regular exams and Pap smears.

How much does the HPV vaccine cost?

The current HPV vaccine costs about \$160 per dose or \$480 for the series of three injections. Most insurance companies are covering the HPV vaccine but you should check with your own insurance for their specific policy.