

The HPV vaccine

Beating cervical cancer

A Q&A sheet for girls and their parents on the HPV vaccination from September 2014



This Q&A on HPV vaccine supports the leaflet that your daughter should have received from her school or GP surgery.

It is intended to answer your and her questions about the human papillomavirus vaccine for girls that will protect against cervical cancer. It provides more detailed information on the topics covered in the leaflet and is designed to answer further questions that you might have.

More information can be found at **www.nhs.uk/hpv**

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer affects the cervix – the entrance to the womb (see *Figure 1*). This cancer is caused by the human papillomavirus or HPV, which is spread from one person to another during sexual activity. There are over 100 types of human papillomaviruses but only 13 of these are known to cause cervical cancer and just two – types 16 and 18 – cause over 70% of the cases (see *Figure 2*).

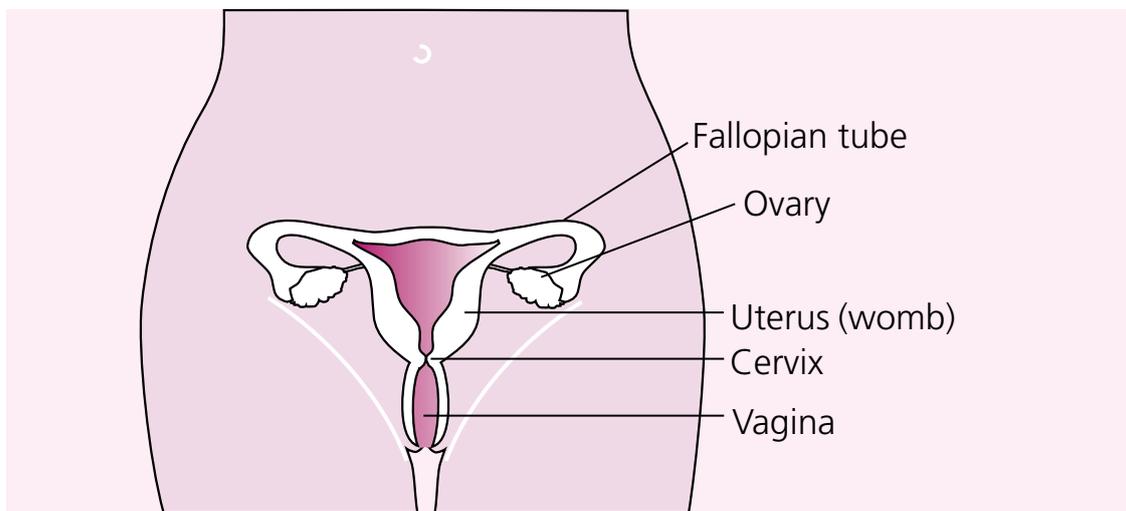
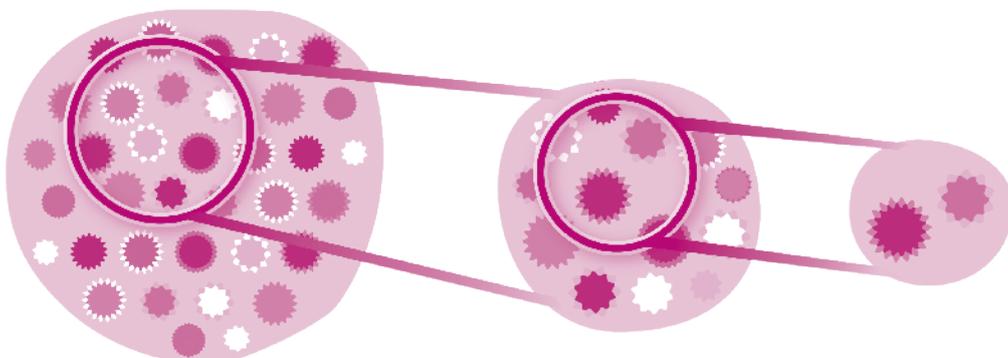


Figure 1 The cervix is the entrance to the womb

The HPV vaccine is being offered to your daughter to protect her against cervical cancer. In most people, the virus does not cause cancer but in some people it does. Around 1000 women die from cervical cancer in the UK each year.



There are over 100 types of human papillomavirus

More than a dozen of these cause cervical cancer...

...and two of these types – 16 and 18 – cause over 70% of the cases of cervical cancer

Figure 2 Diagrammatic representation of the human papillomavirus types that cause cervical cancer

How does the virus cause cancer?

The virus gets into the surface cells of the cervix where it can stay for several years without causing any harm. Then, and for no apparent reason, it may start to cause damage to these cells. The purpose of cervical screening is to detect these changes which, if detected early enough, can be treated to prevent cancer developing. If they are left untreated, cancer can develop and may lead to serious illness and death.

Does the vaccine protect against all cervical cancer?

The HPV vaccine protects against the two virus types (types 16 and 18) that cause over 70% of cervical cancer. The vaccine does not protect against all of the other cancer-causing types, so it's vital that women still go for routine cervical screening tests when they are older.

Having the vaccine reduces the risk of
your daughter getting cervical cancer
by over 70%

Does the vaccine protect against other sexually transmitted infections?

The vaccine currently used in the NHS vaccination programme (Gardasil) also protects against two types of HPV that cause about 90% of the cases of genital warts. HPV vaccination does not protect against other infections spread during sex, such as chlamydia, nor will it stop your daughter getting pregnant, so it's still very important that your daughter gets safer sex messages at the appropriate time.

Why are girls under 16 being offered the vaccine when the age of consent is 16?

The virus that causes cervical cancer is spread by someone having sex or being sexually intimate with another person who has the virus. Both men and women can become infected with this virus. Whilst most girls don't start having sex until they are 16 or older, it is recommended that they routinely have the vaccination at 12 to 13 years of age to get the most benefit from the vaccine. If the vaccine is given after a young woman has started being sexually active, it is possible she may already have been infected by an HPV type that the vaccine can protect against, in which case she will not benefit fully from the vaccination.

Will being infected with HPV cause cancer in someone who hasn't had the vaccination?

Most women who get infected with HPV do not get cervical cancer. Women usually do not even know they have been infected because they have no symptoms.

Nowadays, most women are regularly tested (screened) to see if they have any signs of infection - this is seen as changes to the lining of the cervix that could lead to cancer. These regular tests are called 'smear tests'. The vaccine protects against the two types of virus that cause most cervical cancer but it doesn't protect against all HPV viruses, so:

It will be essential for your daughter
to have regular screening once
she is old enough

What is the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine stops the body being infected by the two human papillomaviruses that cause over 70% of cervical cancers.

At what age will the first dose of the vaccination be given?

All girls aged 12 to 13 years should receive the first HPV vaccination routinely in year 8 at school. The vaccine will be given in her upper arm by a nurse or doctor.

How many doses will be given?

Eligible girls should receive two doses of the vaccine. The second injection should be given anytime between six to 12 months after the first, but it can be given up to 24 months after. Your school or GP will inform you when your daughter will actually have the second dose.

It's important that girls have both doses to get the best protection.

My older daughter had three doses of the HPV vaccine, why is my younger daughter only getting two?

Since the HPV vaccination programme started in the UK in 2008, the vaccine has proved to be very effective. Studies conducted since then suggest that two doses of the HPV vaccine will provide excellent, long-lasting protection for young girls and so countries, such as Switzerland, have moved to this new schedule. From September 2014, the HPV vaccination programme in the UK will consist of two doses of HPV vaccine.

What if my daughter has not had her first HPV vaccine by the age of 15?

If your daughter has not had any HPV vaccine by the time she is 15 years old she will need three doses to have full protection. This is because the response to two doses in older girls is not quite as good, so to be on the safe side she should have three doses, with the second dose given around a month after the first dose, and a final dose given around six months after the first dose. You should speak to your nurse or doctor about making an appointment as soon as possible.

What if my daughter had the first two doses of the old three dose HPV course, does she still need the third one now?

Yes, if your daughter started the three dose course of HPV she should complete it as originally planned.

How will I know when my daughter is going to have the vaccination?

You should have already received information and possibly a consent form if the vaccination is going to be given at school. It is important that the consent form is signed and returned to the school before your daughter's vaccination is due.

Who will be giving my daughter the vaccination?

Most HPV vaccinations are given in school. If this is not offered at your daughter's school, ask your GP practice.

Will our GP know that our daughter has had the HPV vaccination?

Information about the HPV vaccination will be transferred to your GP surgery so it can be entered on your daughter's health record.

Will there be any side effects?

The most common side effects that have been reported in clinical studies of HPV vaccines include swelling, redness and pain at the site of the injection, and headaches. Other side effects such as raised temperature, sickness, itching, rash, and pain in the injected arm were reported in fewer than one in ten but more than one in 100 people. A full list of potential adverse reactions can be found on the [patient information leaflet](#) (PIL).

What about girls who have allergies or other illnesses, can they still have the HPV vaccination?

Yes. Food intolerances, asthma, eczema, hay fever, and allergies generally do not prevent someone from having this vaccine. If you have any concerns about this, speak to your nurse or doctor.

Very rarely, some people have an allergic reaction soon after immunisation. This reaction may be a rash or itching affecting part or all of the body. The nurse will know how to treat this. It is not a reason to withhold further HPV vaccinations.

Even more rarely, people can have a severe reaction, within a few minutes of the injection with breathing difficulties and collapse. This is called an anaphylactic reaction. These are extremely rare and the person giving the vaccine is trained to deal with vaccine anaphylactic reactions. Individuals recover completely with treatment, usually within a few hours.

What if my daughter is off school on the day of the vaccination?

The nurse will try to arrange for her to be offered the vaccine at another time. If your daughter misses either vaccination, for whatever reason, you should speak to her nurse or doctor about making another appointment. It's important that she completes the full course to get the best protection.

What if she doesn't want to have the vaccination?

She doesn't have to have it, if she doesn't want to. But it is recommended that she does for the reasons given above. Having the vaccination now will protect her for many years. Suggest she speaks to the nurse or doctor if she wants more information, on her own, or with you, if she'd prefer.

What if she wants the vaccination but, as her parents, you would rather she didn't have it?

You should discuss this with your daughter, the doctor or nurse to get more information. The decision is legally hers as long as she understands the issues in giving consent. Having the vaccination now will protect your daughter from the most common cause of cervical cancer for many years to come.

Is the HPV vaccine safe if it is given to a pregnant woman?

There is no known risk associated with giving HPV vaccine during pregnancy. HPV vaccine is an inactivated vaccine, which means that it doesn't contain any live organisms, and so cannot cause infection in either the mother or her baby. However, as a matter of precaution, HPV vaccine is not recommended in pregnancy. This is not because of any specific safety concerns with giving HPV vaccine during pregnancy but because there is limited information on using the vaccine in pregnant women.

What should happen if HPV vaccine is given to a pregnant woman?

If a woman finds out she is pregnant after she has been given HPV vaccine, she should discuss this with her GP. Experience so far shows that there is no known risk to her or her baby and there is no reason to believe that the pregnancy cannot continue safely. Once the woman has completed her pregnancy, she can finish the full course of HPV vaccine.

Due to the relatively limited experience so far of using HPV vaccine in pregnant women, it is important to follow up women who have been given the vaccine during pregnancy. This is to provide further information on the safety of the vaccine in these circumstances. Follow-up is being done by Public Health England.

What should you do if you find you are pregnant soon after HPV vaccination?

If you are pregnant and have been given HPV vaccine you should discuss this with your GP. The Public Health England (formerly Health Protection Agency) website (www.hpa.org.uk) has more information or you can telephone 01788 540298 or 0208 327 7471.

What about girls with long-term conditions or who are on medication that reduces the effectiveness of their immune system?

Girls whose immune systems are affected through medication or long-term conditions can have the vaccine but the vaccine may not work as well for them. The two-dose schedule has not been used in girls who have conditions that reduce the effectiveness of their immune system. For this reason these girls should receive three doses of the HPV vaccine within a 6 month period.

Will the vaccine affect any other medication?

There is no evidence that the HPV vaccine reduces the effectiveness of any medication including the contraceptive pill.

What if a girl has already been sexually active and has possibly caught the virus?

If a girl has been sexually active, there is a possibility that she may have already caught HPV. However, as it won't be known whether she has been infected, nor which type of the virus she has been infected with, she should still have the vaccine as it may still protect her.

Why aren't boys being vaccinated?

The purpose of this campaign is to protect girls and women against cervical cancer. Obviously, boys do not get cervical cancer. By protecting all girls against the two most common causes of cervical cancer eventually there will be fewer viruses circulating and so the risk for boys of coming into contact with these viruses, and passing them on, will decrease.

How long does the vaccine protection last for?

The HPV vaccine has been used for many years and tens of millions of girls have been vaccinated and all the indications are that high levels of protection last for many years. The duration of protection will continue to be monitored carefully.

More information

Visit www.nhs.uk/hpv where you can download a factsheet that gives more detailed information on the topics covered in this Q&A sheet.

A complete list of ingredients for the vaccine is given in the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL): www.medicines.org.uk/emc/medicine/19033/pil/gardasil and the Summary of Product Characteristics (SPC): www.medicines.org.uk/emc/medicine/19016/SPC/gardasil/





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