



Beating cervical cancer

The HPV vaccine – questions and answers for parents of girls in Year 9 and 10

This Q&A on the HPV vaccine supports the leaflet that your daughter should have been given at school. Please read this information and then fill in the consent form that came with the booklet and return it to school.

This information is intended to answer the common questions you may have about the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine that will protect your daughter against cervical cancer and tells you where you can find more information if you need it. The vaccine is routinely offered to girls aged 12 to 13 years (Year 9). If your daughter doesn't get it in Year 9, she will be offered it again in Year 10.

More information can be found at <http://pha.site/hpv-ni>

What is cervical cancer?

Cervical cancer affects the cervix – the entrance to the womb (see Figure 1). Each year around 95 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer in Northern Ireland with an average of 22 women dying from the disease.

In addition, 1,225 cases of cervical cancer in situ are diagnosed each year. This is where some cells of the cervix have pre-cancerous changes, and equates to a 1 in 10 likelihood of women here being diagnosed with cancerous changes in the cervix at some point in their life.

This cancer is caused by the human papillomavirus or HPV, which is spread from one person to another during sexual activity (not necessarily sexual intercourse). Both men and women can become infected with this virus. There are over 100 types of HPV but only 13 of these are known to cause cervical cancer and just two – types 16 and 18 – cause 7 out of 10 of the cases.

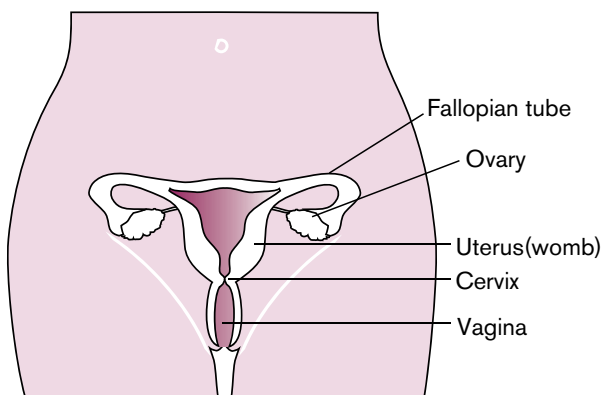


Figure 1 The cervix is the entrance to the womb

The HPV vaccine is being offered to your daughter to protect against types 16 and 18, which are the two most common types causing cervical cancer.

How does HPV 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.

In most people, the virus does not cause cancer but in some people it does. Women usually do not even know they have been infected because they have no symptoms.

Does the vaccine protect against all cervical cancer?

This vaccine protects against the two virus types that cause over 70% of cervical cancer. The vaccine won't protect against all the remaining cancer-causing types, so it's vital that women still go for routine cervical screening (smear tests) to check for cancer. This will also apply to your daughter once she is old enough.

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 will also protect against the two types of HPV that cause the majority of cases of genital warts. It won't protect your daughter against any other sexually transmitted infections such as chlamydia and it won't stop your daughter getting pregnant. So it's still very important that your daughter gets safer sex messages at the appropriate time.

How does the HPV vaccine work?

The vaccine works in the same way as other common vaccines. It is given as an injection in the upper arm. The body reacts by making antibodies that will help the immune system fight HPV infection. The vaccine cannot cause HPV infection or cancer.

How long does the vaccine protection last for?

Studies have shown that vaccinated people maintain high levels of protection for at least twelve years, with no evidence of protection decreasing. Data from twelve clinical trials and ongoing research tell us that the protection provided by HPV vaccine will provide life time protection from these viruses because the immune system develops antibodies to the virus after the vaccination. No boosters are required at present.

Why is the vaccine being routinely offered to girls aged 12-13 years?

HPV is very common and is easily spread through sexual activity. Although it is very unlikely that your daughter is at risk of HPV infection at this age, as most girls don't start having sex until they are much older, it is recommended that they have the vaccine now because studies show that protection from the vaccine is better when girls receive the vaccine at an earlier age.

How will the vaccine be given?

The school health team from your local Health and Social Care Trust will give the vaccinations. The person giving the vaccination will be fully qualified to do this and will know how to deal with any problems that may arise. The vaccine will be given in the upper arm by a nurse or doctor. For the vaccine to work, two injections will be needed within a 12 month period. It's important that your daughter has both vaccinations to get the best protection.

Until recently it had been recommended that girls receive three doses of the vaccine, but recent research has shown that two doses will give as good protection in 12 to 13 year old girls. However, if your daughter is aged 15 years or over at the time of her first dose she will still need three injections within a 12 month period. This is because the research hasn't shown two doses to be as good as three doses in this age group.

When will my daughter have the vaccination?

You should have received a consent form along with this booklet. It is important that the consent form is signed and returned to the school promptly. Your daughter will be offered the HPV vaccine during the current academic year. Girls over 16 years of age are presumed to be capable of self-consenting unless there are specific reasons otherwise.

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

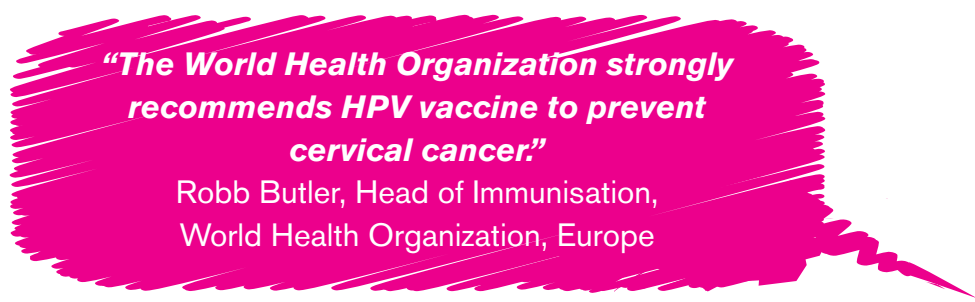
Information about the HPV vaccination will be transferred to your GP's surgery so it can be entered on your daughter's health record.

Is the vaccine safe?

Yes. For more than 10 years the safety of the HPV vaccine has been strictly monitored and frequently reviewed by many international bodies including:

- The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulation Agency (MHRA UK)
- the European Medicines Agency (EMA);
- the World Health Organization Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety.

These international bodies have continually reported that the vaccine is safe with no known long-term side effects. More than 200 million doses have been distributed worldwide.



“The World Health Organization strongly recommends HPV vaccine to prevent cervical cancer.”

Robb Butler, Head of Immunisation,
World Health Organization, Europe

Will there be any side effects?

The side effects are generally mild – mostly soreness, swelling and redness where the injection is generally given in the arm, which soon wears off. Other less common side effects may include headache, nausea, dizziness and/or mild fever.

These can be treated with paracetamol or ibuprofen.

Occasionally girls faint after getting an injection. The girls will be advised to sit down for 10-15 minutes after the vaccination. This helps prevent fainting.

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. It is extremely rare and the nurse or doctor is trained to deal with it. Individuals recover completely with treatment, usually within a few hours. If you would like more information about the vaccine, the Patient Information Leaflet (PIL) for Gardasil can be found at: <https://www.medicines.org.uk/emc/> Type "Gardasil" into the search box.

Parents can report suspected side effects of vaccines through the Yellow Card Scheme. This can be done online by visiting www.yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk or calling 0800 731 6789 (10am to 2pm Monday-Friday only).

What about girls who have allergies or other medical conditions, 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 the school health team or your GP before your daughter has the vaccine.

Will the vaccine affect any other medication?

There is no evidence that the vaccination reduces the effectiveness of any medication or the contraceptive pill.

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

The school health team will arrange for her to be offered the vaccine at another time.

What if my daughter has already been sexually active?

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 which type of the virus she has been infected with, she should still have the vaccine as it may still protect her.

What do I do if I think my daughter is pregnant?

There is no known risk associated with giving the HPV vaccine during pregnancy. However, as a matter of precaution, the HPV vaccine is not recommended in pregnancy. This is not because of any specific safety concerns with giving the HPV vaccine during pregnancy but because there is limited information on using the vaccine during pregnancy. If your daughter finds out she is pregnant soon after she has been given the HPV vaccine, this should be discussed with her GP. Your daughter should complete her pregnancy before finishing the appropriate vaccination schedule.

What if my daughter doesn't want to have the vaccination?

Your daughter does not have to receive the vaccine if she doesn't want to. However it is recommended that she does for the reasons given above. Having the vaccination now will protect her for many years. If your daughter wants more information she should speak to the school health team – on her own, or with you, if she'd prefer.

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

You should discuss this with your daughter, and the school health team to get more information, however, the decision is legally hers as long as she understands the issues in giving consent. It is important for your daughter's future to appreciate that having the vaccination now will protect her from the most common cause of cervical cancer for many years to come.

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, but they still need to know about safer sex to reduce the risk of them catching and spreading HPV.

Additional information on HPV and copies of this Q&A and the leaflet are available from our website on <http://pha.site/hpv-ni> To get the Q&A or the leaflet in another language visit our website or ask the nurse to print you a copy.



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