

Help protect yourself

The essential guide to the HPV vaccination
for young people aged 12 to 13



Public Health
Agency

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This leaflet is about the vaccination (injection) that you can have to protect yourself against HPV-related cancers.

Since 2008, the HPV vaccine has been offered to all 12-13 year old girls in school Years 9 and 10. Since September 2019, the vaccine has also been offered to boys in the same way. This is because the evidence is clear that the HPV vaccine helps protect all young people from HPV-related cancers.

The HPV vaccine helps protect you from cancers that can be caused by HPV, such as:

- up to 90% of cervical cancers in women;
- some mouth and throat cancers in men and women;
- some cancers of the anus and genitals in men and women.

The vaccine will also protect you against the two types of HPV that cause the majority of cases of genital warts. It won't protect you against any other sexually transmitted infections and it won't prevent pregnancy.

HPV and how it spreads

Human papillomavirus (HPV) infection is very common with as many as half the population infected with HPV some time in their lives. You can catch it through intimate sexual contact with another person who already has the virus.

There are over 100 types of HPV but only 13 of them are known to cause cancer. There are usually no symptoms, so many won't realise they are infected. Most of the time, the virus does not cause cancer because it is killed off by the body's immune system, but not always – some infections persist and lead to cancer or genital warts – this is why the vaccine is so important.

The HPV vaccine

More than 280 million doses of the HPV vaccine have been given worldwide, including 120 million doses in the US and over 10 million in the UK. According to the World Health Organization, 140 countries are using the HPV vaccine around the world (2023).

The vaccine is having a major impact on HPV infections in the UK and will save hundreds of lives every year. A recent study in Scotland shows that no cervical cancer cases have been detected in women who got their HPV vaccine when they were 12-13 years old when the programme was first introduced in 2008. It shows how effective the HPV vaccine is.

It is best to have the vaccine before you become sexually active. However, if you are sexually active it is still important to get the vaccine. It is recommended that you have the vaccination at 12 to 13 years of age to protect you as early as possible.



Having the vaccination

The school nursing team from your local Health and Social Care Trust (HSCT) will arrange for you to have the vaccination in Year 9 at school. If you miss the vaccine in Year 9, the school nursing team will offer it again during their next visit to the school. The nurse will give you the vaccination in your upper arm. Most people will need only one dose to be protected.

If you suffer from asthma, eczema, hay fever or other allergies, you can still have the vaccine. If you have any concerns about this, speak to the nurse before having the vaccine.



Side effects

The side effects of the vaccination are quite mild – usually just soreness, swelling and redness in the arm, which soon wears off. Other less common side effects may include headache, nausea, dizziness and/or mild fever.

Severe allergic reactions are very rare and nurses are trained to deal with them. People recover completely with treatment, usually within a few hours.

The vaccine meets the rigorous safety standards required for it to be used in the UK and other European countries. Millions of doses of vaccine have already been given in the UK and around the world. As with all vaccines, reports of side effects are closely monitored and reviewed.

If you experience any suspected side effects to the vaccine, you can report these on the Yellow Card website or by calling **0800 731 6789** (9.00am to 5.00pm Monday to Friday) or by downloading the Yellow Card app.

www.mhra.gov.uk/yellowcard

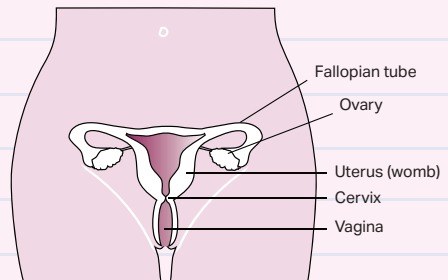


Women and cervical cancer screening

The vaccine protects against nine types of HPV, including types 16 and 18, which cause most cases of cervical cancer (up to 90 %).

Cervical cancer occurs in the cervix (the entrance to the womb – see diagram below). Cervical cancer can be very serious and around 20 women die from it in Northern Ireland each year.

The vaccine does not protect you against all the other types of HPV, so girls will still need to have cervical screening (smear tests) when invited (at age 25).



Other cancers

There are currently no screening programmes for other HPV-related cancers. If you are worried about any symptoms contact your GP.

Missed your appointment?

Don't worry, you will either be seen again in school or the HSCT school nursing team will contact your parents to arrange another appointment. You can get the HPV vaccine up to your 25th birthday if you miss it at school.

Giving consent

Talk to your parent or carer about the vaccine. You will have been given a consent form that they should sign giving permission for you to have the vaccination. It's important that you return the signed form to your school nursing team before the deadline.

If your parents are not sure that you should have the vaccination, you should still return the form and speak to your school nursing team or your GP. Having the vaccination now will reduce your risk of getting a HPV-related cancer for many years.

More information



To get this leaflet in another language, scan the QR code, visit www.pha.site/HPVvaccination or ask your school nurse to print you a copy.



Your parents will have received a question and answer booklet that provides more detailed information on giving consent and the other topics covered in this leaflet. To get the Q&A for parents and translations, scan the QR code or visit www.pha.site/hpvquestions





For more information see www.pha.site/hpv



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