

Facts about HPV and the vaccine

FACT: Both males and females can get HPV.

It's very common – 9 out of 10 people have HPV at some point in their lives. Most people clear the virus without ever knowing they have it. It is when it persists in the cells that some types of HPV can, usually over decades, cause cancer.

Although cervical cancer is the most common type of cancer caused by HPV, it also causes cases of penile, anal and throat cancers in men and vaginal, vulval, anal and throat cancers in women.

The HPV vaccine protects against around 90% of cervical cancers, however it also provides protection against most of the genital cancers in men caused by HPV infection. Additionally, the vaccine protects against 90% of genital warts in both women and men.

As with any vaccine, the HPV vaccine may not fully protect everyone who is vaccinated and does not protect against all HPV types. The vaccine cannot help clear HPV infection that is already in your cells.

FACT: The vaccine works best when it's given before you're sexually active.

You may not be thinking about being sexually active yet, however the vaccine works best if it is given before exposure to HPV – that is, before sexual activity commences.

The vaccine also works best when given at a younger age. Research shows that younger people create more antibodies to the vaccine than those aged in their late teens. This is why those aged 14 and under only need two doses instead of three. Waiting until you are older means that you need the extra third dose, which you may need to pay for.

FACT: You can be infected with HPV from one sexual partner, the first time you are sexually active.

Condoms offer some but not total protection from HPV, as they don't cover all of the genital skin. They do offer protection from many other sexually transmitted infections though, and help prevent unwanted pregnancies.

FACT: There is no evidence that boys and girls who receive the vaccine have sex earlier than those who do not have the vaccine, and nor do they have more sexual partners once they become sexually active.

Vaccination is a normal part of growing up, with the vast majority of children vaccinated at school.

FACT: The vaccine has been tested and proven to help prevent cervical abnormalities which can develop into cervical cancer.

In initial clinical trials, the original vaccine was given to 20,000 women aged 16–26 years in 33 countries including Australia, before it was approved for widespread use.

These trials showed the vaccine is almost 100% effective in preventing abnormalities in cells in the cervix caused by cancer causing high-risk HPV types 16 and 18. These abnormalities are a proven pre-cursor to cervical cancer. The trials of Gardasil9 demonstrated that this vaccine is almost 100% effective at preventing these cell abnormalities in the cervix caused by cancer-causing HPV types 31, 33, 45, 52 and 58 as well.

Further clinical trials involving more than 4,000 males aged 16–26 years from 18 countries showed the vaccine was 90% effective in preventing genital warts and abnormalities associated with penile cancer, and 78% effective in preventing anal disease, caused by HPV types 6, 11, 16 and 18.

FACT: The HPV vaccine is safe.

The [Global Advisory Committee on Vaccine Safety of the World Health Organization](#) has reviewed all published and emerging data about the vaccines in real world use and declared HPV vaccines safe for use seven times so far. More than 270 million doses of HPV vaccines have been administered worldwide (as of May 2017). The vaccine's safety is still (and will always be) closely monitored by scientific organisations around the world including the World Health Organization.

All vaccines can have side effects. The reactions that people have had after the HPV vaccine have been similar to reactions from other vaccines. The most common side effects are pain, redness and/or swelling at the site of injection.

Very rarely, more serious side effects such as anaphylactic (allergic) reaction can occur, usually if you are allergic to an ingredient in the vaccine such as yeast.

All people are monitored for 15 minutes after having the vaccine. If an allergic reaction does occur, it can be treated quickly and successfully – every immunisation provider is trained and equipped to deal with such a reaction.

FACT: The vaccine cannot cause cancer or any other HPV-related diseases.

The vaccine does not contain any live or killed HPV virus. It is made from a single protein like the one the virus has on its outer coat. When you have the vaccine, your body makes antibodies which it uses to fight the real virus if you're ever exposed to it.

PLEASE NOTE: The HPV vaccine is available for free for a limited time only and conditions do apply.

MORE INFORMATION: Contact your local immunisation provider or doctor. Visit www.hpvvaccine.org.au.