

Human papillomavirus HPV and immunisation

Description:

A vaccine has been developed to help prevent the most common types of cervical cancer. The vaccine is available free to girls in Year 8 through the School Based Vaccination Program.

About the HPV:

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the name for a group of viruses that cause skin warts, genital warts and some cancers. Different types of HPV can affect different parts of the body. Some of them can infect the genital area.

Anyone who has ever had sexual contact may have HPV - it is so common that four out of five people will have had genital HPV infection at some time in their lives. Most genital infections with HPV do not cause any symptoms and people usually do not know they have the infection.

Most women who have HPV clear the virus naturally and do NOT develop cervical cancer. Don't confuse human papillomavirus (HPV) with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) or herpes virus as they are different infections.

About cervical cancer:

Cervical cancer (cancer of the cervix) is a disease where cancer cells grow and spread quickly throughout the body from the cervix. The cervix is the lowest part of the uterus (womb).

Infection of the cervix with particular types of HPV can cause cervical cell changes that may lead to cervical cancer. This usually takes more than 10 years to develop.

Each year in Australia, more than 700 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer and over 200 women die from the disease. However the incidence of cervical cancer has decreased by 48% since 1991 due to the success of the National Cervical Screening Program (involving regular pap smears).

Treatment:

The HPV infection itself cannot be treated. In most people, the virus is cleared naturally in one to two years. Treatments are only available for the abnormalities caused by the infection, such as genital warts and changes to cells in the cervix caused by HPV.

Prevention :

Some types of HPV infection can be prevented. Two new vaccines have been developed to help prevent the most common types of cervical cancer. The vaccine used in Queensland as part of the National Immunisation Program Schedule can prevent infection caused by four types of HPV. Two of these types cause seven out of 10 cervical cancers. The other two types cause nine out of 10 cases of genital warts.

Immunisation recommendations:

Immunisation against HPV is recommended as part of the National Immunisation Program Schedule, and the vaccine is available free for:

- Girls aged 12 - 13 years in Queensland. The vaccine is available to all Year 8 girls through the School Based Vaccination Program. Alternatively, Year 8 girls can receive the vaccine from their doctor, however, a consultation fee may be charged.

The vaccine is given as 3 doses over a six month period. Missed doses should be received as soon as possible. The need for a booster dose is still under review.

For more information about the vaccine, see the [human papillomavirus vaccine factsheet](#).

Free HPV vaccine has also been offered for a limited time to young women aged up to 26 years as part of the

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National HPV Vaccination Program. This program has almost finished. To be eligible for free vaccine, females aged 18 to 26 years of age must have received their first dose of vaccine on or before 30 June 2009 and must complete all 3 doses by 31 December 2009.

Possible side effects of the vaccine:

The HPV vaccine used in the national program was shown to be safe during large clinical trials. All medicines and vaccines used in Australia must be approved by the Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) which assesses safety.

HPV vaccine is generally well tolerated. The most common side effects are discomfort, redness, and pain and swelling at the injection site. Other symptoms may include headache, fever and nausea. More serious side effects are extremely rare. The most common immediate reaction to any vaccination in older children is fainting.

Contact your immunisation provider if you or your child has a reaction following vaccination which you consider serious or unexpected.

Pre-vaccination checklist:

This checklist helps your doctor/nurse decide about vaccinating you or your child.

Please tell your doctor/nurse if the person about to be vaccinated:

- is unwell today
- has a disease which lowers immunity (eg. leukaemia, cancer, HIV/AIDS) or is having treatment which lowers immunity (eg. oral steroid medicines such as cortisone and prednisone, radiotherapy, chemotherapy)
- has had a severe reaction following any vaccine
- has **any** severe allergies (to anything)
- has had any vaccine in the past month
- has had an injection of immunoglobulin, or received any blood products or a whole blood transfusion within the past year
- is pregnant
- has a past history of Guillain-Barré syndrome
- was a preterm infant
- has a chronic illness
- has a bleeding disorder.

A different vaccine schedule may be recommended if the person to be vaccinated:

- identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
- does not have a functioning spleen
- is planning a pregnancy or anticipating parenthood
- is a parent, grandparent or carer of a newborn
- lives with someone who has a disease which lowers immunity (eg. leukaemia, cancer, HIV/AIDS), or lives with someone who is having treatment which lowers immunity (eg. oral steroid medicines such as cortisone and prednisone, radiotherapy, chemotherapy).

Care after vaccination:

- For redness or swelling at the injection site, apply a cold compress.
- To lower temperature or relieve discomfort, paracetamol may be given.
- If fever persists, consult your doctor.
- If any reaction occurs that you consider serious or unexpected, seek medical advice.
- Contact the service provider if you or your child has a reaction following vaccination.

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Where can I be immunised?:

You can be immunised at your local doctor or medical centre. Some councils, community child health and community health centres hold free immunisation clinics. Check with them for details.

Resources :

For further information please contact:

- your doctor
- 13HEALTH (13 43 25 84)
- Immunise Australia National Infoline: 1800 671 811.

Other resources:

Immunise Australia A website about immunisation produced by the Australian Department of Health and Ageing.

National HPV Vaccination Program For information about the national program.

National HPV Vaccination Program Register

For information on cervical cancer and Pap smears, visit Queensland Health's **Cervical Screening Program** website or the **National Cancer Screening** website.

School Based Vaccination Program website For information about the school vaccination program.

National Health and Medical Research Council, 2008. **The Australian Immunisation Handbook**(9th Ed)

Related content:

- Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine
- National HPV Vaccination Program Register factsheet
- School Based Vaccination Program: HPV vaccination - Year 8 girls factsheet
- **Genital Warts and Human Papillomavirus Safe Sex factsheet**