

Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine

Description:

A vaccine has been developed to help prevent the most common types of cervical cancer.

The HPV vaccine is available free for girls in Year 8 through the School Based Vaccination Program. Alternatively, Year 8 girls can receive the free vaccine from their doctor, however, a consultation fee may be charged.

Practical Advice

HPV Vaccine

How is the HPV vaccine given?

The HPV vaccine is given as a series of three injections into the upper arm muscle. It should be given within a six month period - for example:

- first dose - chosen date;
- second dose - 2 months after the first dose; and
- third dose - 4 months after the second dose.

The vaccine is most effective when all three doses have been given. Missed doses should be given as soon as possible.

How effective is the vaccine?

The vaccine used in Queensland as part of the National Immunisation Program Schedule (called GARDASIL®) provides protection against four types of HPV for more than 90% of uninfected women who are vaccinated. The vaccine protects against infection with the types of HPV which cause more than 70% of cases of cervical cancer. This means that the vaccine will not prevent all types of HPV that cause cervical cancer.

There is another registered HPV vaccine available in Australia (called Cervarix®). This vaccine protects against two types of HPV and is not currently used in Queensland as part of the National Immunisation Program Schedule.

Will booster doses of HPV vaccine be necessary?

The need for booster doses is still under review.

Will Pap smears still be necessary after vaccination?

Yes. Regular Pap smears are important as the HPV vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer. All females whether vaccinated against HPV or not will need regular Pap smears from the age of 18 or within two years of first having sex, whichever is later.

Pap smears detect abnormal changes to cells in the cervix so treatment can start before cancer develops.

What does the HPV vaccine contain?

In addition to virus-like particles which protect against HPV, the vaccine contains yeast, aluminium adjuvant, sodium chloride, L-histidine, polysorbate and sodium borate.

These ingredients are included in very small amounts to either assist the vaccine to work more efficiently or to act as a preservative. The vaccine does not contain 'live' virus and will not cause infection with HPV.

How safe is the HPV vaccine?

The vaccine was shown to be safe during large clinical trials. All medicines and vaccines used in Australia

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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 and include severe allergic reaction. The most common immediate reaction to any vaccination in older children is fainting.

What if I have previously had a severe reaction to another vaccine?

Unless you have had an immediate severe allergic reaction to a previous HPV vaccine or any of its components, then it is safe for you to receive the HPV vaccine.

I am scheduled to receive other vaccinations as part of the school program eg. chickenpox and/or hepatitis B. Can I have the HPV vaccine at the same time?

Yes. HPV vaccine can be given at the same time as chickenpox, and/or hepatitis B vaccines. Whether more than one vaccine is given at the same visit is up to the service provider and how they schedule their visits to the school.

Are there more side effects from receiving more than one vaccine at the same time? For example, if hepatitis B vaccine is given at the same time as HPV vaccine?

No. Having more than one vaccine at the same time is unlikely to increase the risk of side effects when they are given at the same visit, and giving a number of vaccines at the same visit does not "overload" the immune system.

What do I do if I have a reaction to the vaccine?

A cold damp cloth at the injection site may relieve discomfort. Paracetamol can be given to relieve discomfort.

If fever persists or pain or swelling continues for more than two days, or any reaction occurs that you consider serious or unexpected, seek medical advice.

In the case of emergency, DIAL 000.

Contact the immunisation provider and advise if you have a reaction following any dose of the vaccine.

Should I be vaccinated if I have had sex?

Yes. If you have had sexual contact, then you may have been infected with one or more of the four types of HPV. However, you may still benefit from HPV vaccine because you may not have been infected with all four HPV types covered by the vaccine.

What if I am exposed to HPV between doses?

Exposure to any of the four HPV types covered by the vaccine before the three doses are completed may slightly lessen the effect of the vaccine. You should still have the full course of the vaccine.

Does the vaccine affect the contraceptive pill?

No. The vaccine does not contain hormones and will not interact with the contraceptive pill.

HPV vaccine and other medical conditions

I have severe allergies. Can I still be vaccinated?

Unless you have had a severe reaction to any components of the HPV vaccine including virus-like particles which protect against HPV, yeast, aluminium adjuvant, sodium chloride, L-histidine, polysorbate and sodium borate; you can be vaccinated. Contact your doctor if you are concerned about vaccination in the case of existing severe allergies.

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Can I be vaccinated with HPV vaccine if I have asthma and take cortisone or prednisone using a "puffer"?

Yes, it is safe to vaccinate someone who has asthma with HPV vaccine, whatever medication they are on.

Vaccine and pregnancy

Should the vaccine be given to a young woman who is or thinks she may be pregnant?

No. Any young woman who is, or thinks she may be pregnant should not be vaccinated. Anyone becoming pregnant before the completion of the three dose schedule should complete the course after childbirth.

Can I be vaccinated when there are pregnant women in the household?

Yes. The vaccine does not contain live virus that could cause disease in the person receiving the vaccine or their contacts.

Can the vaccine be given to breastfeeding women?

Yes. The vaccine can be given to someone who is breastfeeding.

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) and immunisation factsheet**
- **National HPV Vaccination Program Register factsheet**
- **School Based Vaccination Program: HPV vaccination - Year 8 girls factsheet**