

Your guide to the HPV vaccine

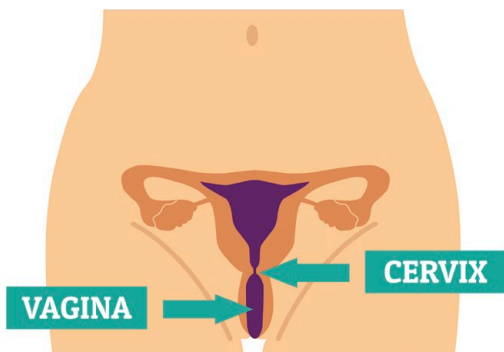


This leaflet gives you information about the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine offered to all girls in school year 8 to protect against cervical cancer.

This leaflet explains why the HPV vaccine is needed, what side effects you might have from it and answers some frequently asked questions about the vaccine.

What is cervical cancer?

After breast cancer, cervical cancer is the most common women's cancer worldwide. Cervical cancer develops in the cervix (the entrance to the womb) and is caused by a virus called the human papillomavirus, also known as HPV.



In the UK, around 3000 cases of cervical cancer are diagnosed every year and about 900 women die from it. Each year in Wales around 150 women are diagnosed with cervical cancer, with an average of 50 women a year dying from the disease.

What is HPV and how is it spread?

There are over 100 types of HPV but only 13 of them are known to cause cancer.

The virus is very common and you can catch it by being sexually active with another person who already has the virus. Most people will be infected with HPV at some time in their lives.

There are usually no symptoms, so many people 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 this does not always happen, and this is why the vaccine is so important.

Most girls will not become exposed to the virus until their late teenage years but the vaccine works best when it is given earlier to provide long-term protection.



How does the HPV vaccine work?

The HPV vaccine protects against the two types of virus that cause most cases (over 70%) of cervical cancer. Because the vaccine does not protect you against all types of HPV, you will still need to have regular smear tests when you are older.

Having this vaccine will also protect you against the two types of HPV that cause most cases of genital warts. It won't protect you against any other sexually transmitted diseases (such as chlamydia) and it won't stop you getting pregnant.

The HPV vaccine is used in over 80 countries, including the USA, Australia, Canada and most of Europe, and more than 100 million people have received the vaccine worldwide. It has been used in the UK since 2008, and most young women in the recommended age group receive the vaccine. There is good evidence that the vaccine is already having a major impact on reducing the level of HPV infections that cause cancer.

How will I have the vaccination?

The HPV vaccine is usually offered in school as an injection given in your upper arm.

You will be offered the first injection in year 8. You will usually be offered the second injection six to 12 months later, but it can be given up to 24 months after the first injection. Girls who have a weakened immune system, or who are 15 or older and receiving their first dose, need a course of three injections over 12 months.

The HPV vaccine is offered to all girls in year 8 (aged 12 to 13) but you can start the course any time up until your 18th birthday.

To get the best protection, you must complete the full course of vaccinations.



Are there any reasons why I should not have the HPV vaccine?

There are very few reasons why you shouldn't have the vaccine.

You should not have the HPV vaccine if you have had a very severe, life-threatening reaction to any of the vaccine contents or to a previous dose of HPV vaccine.

If you have any other medical conditions, including a bleeding disorder where your blood doesn't clot properly or allergies, speak to the person offering you the vaccine.

What if I am ill on the day of the appointment?

If you are ill with a fever on the day the vaccine is due, delay the vaccination until you are better.

If you have a minor illness without a fever, such as a cold, you should have the vaccination as normal.

Are there any side effects?

The side effects of the HPV vaccination are usually quite mild. Soreness, redness or swelling in the arm where the injection was given is common, but this should wear off in a couple of days. Some people may feel sick or have a headache, fever, tiredness or aching muscles.

Very rarely, some people have an allergic reaction soon after a vaccination.

This may be a rash or itching affecting part or all of the body.

Most side effects are mild, clear up naturally or can be treated quickly, and you can continue with the course of HPV vaccination.

Even more rarely, some people can have a severe reaction soon after vaccination, which causes breathing difficulties and may cause them to collapse. This is called an anaphylactic reaction and can also happen with other medicines and foods. These reactions are extremely rare and nurses are trained to manage them. People who have an anaphylactic reaction can be successfully treated and usually recover completely within a few hours.

You can find more information on possible side effects and vaccine contents in the patient information leaflets (PILs) or summary of product characteristics (SPCs) available at www.medicines.org.uk/emc. You will need to put the name of the vaccine (Gardasil) in the search box.

Young people or their parents/guardians can report suspected side effects of vaccines and medicines through the Yellow Card scheme. This can be done online at yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk or by calling the Yellow Card scheme hotline on 0800 731 6789 (Monday to Friday 10am to 2pm).

Is the HPV vaccine safe?

All reports of side effects are closely monitored and reviewed. HPV vaccines meet the strict safety standards required for use in the UK.

Extensive reviews of vaccine safety have found that evidence does not support a link between the HPV vaccine and a number of serious and chronic illnesses.

What is the name of the HPV vaccine I will be given?

The HPV vaccine currently used as part of the NHS vaccination programme in the UK is called Gardasil.

What about giving consent?

It is recommended that young people and their parents or guardians share information about the vaccine and discuss it together.

If you are being offered the vaccine at school, you will be given a consent form that your parent or guardian should sign giving their permission for you to have the vaccination.

Young people aged 16 and over are legally able to give their own consent. (Those under 16 may also be able to give consent for themselves.)

You will be given the opportunity to ask any questions and discuss any concerns you may have before you receive the vaccine.

Information on consent in health care for young people is available from www.wales.gov.uk/immunisation.

What should I do if I feel unwell after the vaccination?

If you feel unwell with a temperature after the vaccination, you can take paracetamol or ibuprofen. Read the instructions carefully and make sure you take the correct dose.

If necessary, take a second dose later. If your temperature is still high after the second dose, contact your GP surgery or NHS Direct Wales on 0845 46 47 (or call 111 if this service is available in your area).

Do not take medicines that contain aspirin if you are under 16 years of age.



I missed my vaccination, can I still have it?

Yes. If you missed any of your HPV doses, you should contact your school nurse or GP surgery to make arrangements to have the vaccine as soon as possible to get the best protection. The person giving you the vaccine will be able to tell you when any further doses are due.

As part of the UK vaccination programme, you can start the HPV vaccine course up to your 18th birthday. If you have already started the course, you can complete any missed doses after this age.

Should girls who are already sexually active still have the vaccination?

Yes, girls who are or have been sexually active should still be vaccinated.

After I've had my HPV vaccine, do I still need to go for smear tests?

Yes. All women are offered regular cervical screening (smear tests) from age 25. The vaccine protects against the two main HPV types that cause 7 out of 10 cases of cervical cancer. But it doesn't protect against all HPV types, so screening is still needed to pick up cervical abnormalities or HPV infection that could lead to cancer.

This combination of vaccination and cervical screening offers the best protection against cervical cancer.

What if I have not had my first HPV vaccine by the age of 15?

If you have not had any HPV vaccine doses by the time you are 15, you will need three doses. This is because the response to two doses in older girls is not quite as good. The three-dose course includes doses given one and six months after the first.

How do we know that the HPV vaccine works?

In the UK we are already seeing a significant fall in infections with HPV types that cause the majority of cervical cancer cases.

There is also evidence from around the world that the number of pre-cancerous changes in the cervix have fallen by over 50% where HPV vaccination programmes have been introduced.

There has also been a large fall in cases of genital warts in young people. This positive effect is seen in girls and also in boys as the HPV vaccine prevents the virus from spreading (an effect called herd protection).

Where can I get more information?

The routine vaccination schedule that shows you which vaccinations are offered in Wales is available from:

www.publichealthwales.org/vaccines

More information on vaccination and the HPV programme in Wales is available from NHS Direct Wales at: www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/immunisations

For more information about cervical screening visit: www.cervicalscreeningwales.wales.nhs.uk

You can read a safety review on HPV vaccines at: www.who.int/vaccine_safety/committee/topics/hpv/June_2017/en

A question and answer sheet 'HPV vaccination and cervical cancer: addressing the myths' is available from:

www.nhsdirect.wales.nhs.uk/encyclopaedia/h/article/hpvvaccinationforgirls/

If you have any questions or want more information, contact your school nurse or GP surgery. You can also call NHS Direct Wales on **0845 46 47** (or call 111 if this service is available in your area).