

# What Preteens Should Know about HPV and the HPV Vaccine

## About the Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

**HPV** is a **virus**. A virus is a kind of **germ**. There are many kinds of viruses. Viruses can make you sick — they can cause a cold, the flu, or other illness. HPV is a very common kind of virus.

**HPV** is **spread** from one person to another when they have **skin-to-skin contact** of the genitals (sex organs). HPV can cause warts on the genitals. Warts are thick growths of skin.

## HPV and the Cervix

The **cervix** is the **opening** to the **uterus** (see the figure). The uterus is where the baby grows when a woman is pregnant. HPV can cause cells to grow abnormally in the cervix.

A **Pap test** is a test done by a nurse, doctor, or midwife to **check** for **abnormal cells** in the cervix. When a Pap test shows there are abnormal cells, the cells can be treated so they don't turn into cancer of the cervix.

**Cancer of the cervix is rare** but can be very serious.

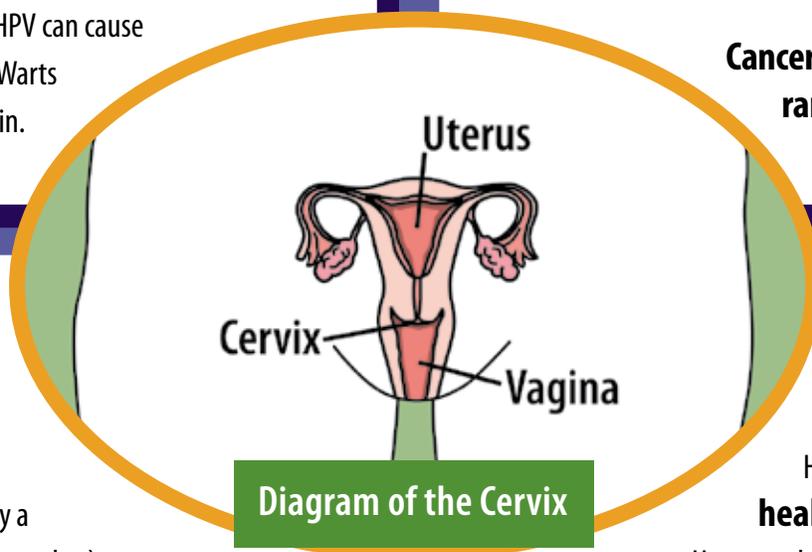


Diagram of the Cervix

## About the HPV Vaccine

**Four types** of HPV can be **prevented** by a **vaccine** (an injection, or shot).

The HPV vaccine prevents most abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix. The vaccine protects against most cases of cancer of the cervix. It can also prevent the warts caused by HPV.

The vaccine protects best when given between the ages of **9–15 years old**. The most common side effect is soreness where the shot was given. The vaccine is given in three doses over 6 months. It is important to get all three shots.

## Health Tips

Have **regular health checkups**. Have regular Pap tests when you are older.

**Don't smoke cigarettes** because smoking can increase the risk of getting cancer of the cervix.

**Talk** with your **nurse, doctor, parents**, or other trusted adult if you have questions about HPV or the HPV vaccine.