

What Teens 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 any kind of sexual activity involving **skin-to-skin contact** with the genitals (sex organs). HPV can cause genital warts. Warts are thick growths of skin.

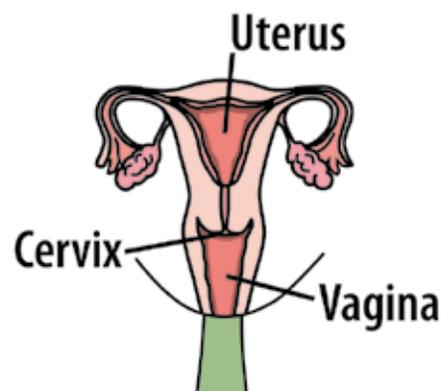


Diagram of the Cervix

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. It is important to have Pap tests, because abnormal cells in the cervix usually do not cause any symptoms. 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. **It can be life-threatening.**

Where to Get More Information — <http://www.cdc.gov/std/HPV/STDFact-HPV-vaccine.htm>

About the HPV Vaccine

Four types of HPV can be **prevented** by a **vaccine** (an injection, or shot). The vaccine is approved for young women and men ages 9–26 years old.

The vaccine does **not** treat or cure HPV. It protects best when given before a young woman or man becomes sexually active. However, it still gives protection after the start of sexual activity.

The vaccine against HPV prevents most abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix. If you have already had abnormal cells in your cervix (an abnormal Pap test) the vaccine won't treat these cells, but it can protect you against having abnormal cells in the future. The vaccine protects against the types of HPV that cause most cases (70%) of cancer of the cervix. The vaccine also protects against the types of HPV that cause most cases (90%) of warts in the genital area.

The **most common side effect** is **soreness** where the shot was given. The vaccine is given as three shots over 6 months. It is important to get all three shots.

You should **not** get the **HPV vaccine** if you are **pregnant** or are **allergic** to ingredients in the vaccine. If you got some of the vaccine when you were pregnant but didn't know you were pregnant, you should finish your series of three shots after your pregnancy.

Other Ways to Prevent HPV and Cervical Cancer

The **HPV vaccine** does **not protect** against **all types** of HPV. You can **decrease** your chance of **getting** and spreading all types of genital HPV by:

- **waiting** until you are older before becoming sexually active,
- **using condoms** for sexual activity,
- **being** in a relationship in which each partner is **faithful**—that is, neither partner has any kind of sexual activity with anyone else,
- **not smoking** cigarettes or quitting smoking, because smoking can make the cells of your cervix more likely to grow abnormally, and
- **having regular Pap tests** starting at age 21.

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

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