The HPV Vaccine: What You Need to Know

The HPV vaccine is the best way to protect yourself from getting human papillomavirus (HPV). In this handout, you will learn why the HPV vaccine is important. You will also learn about when you should get the vaccine and side effects of the vaccine.

WHAT IS HPV?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection among teens and young adults. This means HPV is spread through sexual contact, like vaginal, anal or oral sex. Many people have HPV, but don’t know it because they don’t have any symptoms.

In girls, HPV can also cause cancer of the vagina, vulva (outside of the vagina) or cervix (the lower part of the uterus inside the vagina).

HOW DOES HPV AFFECT GIRLS AND BOYS?

- In both boys and girls, HPV causes genital warts (growths or bumps around your genitals). It can also cause cancer of your anus (bottom, or anal cancer), tongue or back of your throat (oropharyngeal cancer).
- In girls, HPV can cause cancer of the vagina, vulva (outer part of the vagina) or cervix (lower part of the uterus inside the vagina).

WHY SHOULD I GET THE HPV VACCINE?

The vaccine helps with two things:

- Prevent you from getting HPV from others
- Protects you from different types of cancer. In girls, it protects you from cancer of the vagina, vulva or cervix. In boys, it protects you from cancer of the anus.

WHEN SHOULD I GET THE HPV VACCINE?

Girls can get the vaccine anytime between ages 11-26. Boys can get the vaccine anytime between ages 11-21. The earlier you get the vaccine, the better. You can get the vaccine before or after you become sexually active (decide to have sex).

WHAT ARE THE SIDE EFFECTS OF GETTING THE HPV VACCINE?

The HPV vaccine is very safe, but it has a few possible side effects. Many of these don’t last long and go away on their own:

- Pain or soreness in your arm where you have the vaccine
- Dizziness that goes away after about 30 minutes (half an hour)
- Fainting
- A low fever

Did you know?

The HPV vaccine is actually 3 of the same vaccine that you get over a period of 6 months. You need all 3 doses to make sure you get the most protection.

A note for your parents...

The HPV vaccine can be expensive, even with health insurance. Some health insurance plans cover the cost of the vaccine, but not the cost of a nurse or doctor giving it to your child. Some insurance companies also don’t cover the vaccine after age 26.

Getting the HPV vaccine doesn’t mean your child will engage in more risky sexual behaviors. It protects him/her from HPV, different cancers and genital warts.