



Community and Health Services
Infectious Diseases Control Division

HPV

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Infection and the HPV Vaccine (Gardasil®)

What is HPV Infection?

- HPV infection is a sexually transmitted infection. It is caused by HPV, which is a very common virus
- Both males and females can be infected with HPV. About 75 percent of people who have had sex have been exposed to HPV at some time in their life. The risk of being infected with HPV increases with having sex at an early age, having many sex partners, or having sex with someone who has had many partners
- There are over 100 strains of HPV
 - some strains of HPV cause genital warts, which are usually painless but might be itchy, uncomfortable and hard to get rid of
 - some strains of HPV cause genital cancers, including cervical cancer. There are about 400 deaths each year in Canada due to cervical cancer

How does HPV spread?

- HPV spreads through sexual contact or skin-to-skin contact in the genital area with an infected person
- The virus can be found in and around the genital area including: the vagina and vaginal wall, the vulva, cervix, penis, and rectum

What are the symptoms of HPV infection?

Many people with HPV do not experience any symptoms. They may unknowingly spread the virus to other people. Sometimes HPV infection causes warts to develop in and around the genital area, including the groin and thigh. The warts can vary in colour and shape but are usually flesh coloured. They can be flat or raised and may be found alone or in clusters. Women infected with certain strains of HPV may develop changes in the cells of their cervix that can lead to cancer. These changes can be detected through your annual pap smear.

Is there a cure for HPV?

There is no cure for HPV, but the body's immune system will often fight off HPV infection. Treatment is available for both genital warts and for changes in the cells of the cervix to prevent cervical cancer from developing.

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How can HPV infection be prevented?

- Abstain from having sex or genital contact with others, or if you are sexually active, limit the number of partners you have
- Use condoms. They will offer some protection from HPV, but since they do not cover all of the genital skin, they do not completely protect against HPV
- If you are a female between the ages of 9 and 26, get vaccinated against HPV with Gardasil®

Regular Pap tests are still needed to screen for cervical cancer, even if you have received Gardasil®, and should be started within three years of becoming sexually active.

What is Gardasil®?

Gardasil® is a vaccine that helps to protect against cancer of the cervix and genital warts. It is recommended for females between the ages of nine and twenty-six.

- It is almost 100 percent effective in protecting against four strains of HPV
 - It protects against strains 16 and 18, which cause 70 percent of cases of cervical cancer in Canada
 - It also protects against strains 6 and 11, which cause 90 percent of the cases of genital warts
- Gardasil® is most effective if it is received before becoming sexually active. The vaccine can provide some protection if sexual activity has already taken place, but it is less effective in females who have been infected with HPV, depending on the strain
- The vaccine's protection lasts for at least five years. A booster shot may be needed later in life
- The vaccine is given as a needle in the upper arm. Three injections are needed over a period of six months to be fully protected

Note: Gardasil® is currently being provided by the Ontario government at no cost for all females in grade eight.

What are the side effects of Gardasil®?

The HPV vaccine is safe and well tolerated. If side effects occur, they are usually mild, such as pain, swelling, itchiness and redness where the shot was given.

Some people may develop a headache, fever, nausea and swelling of the throat and nose passages. Rarely, there may be side effects such as throat spasms, inflammation or infection of the gastrointestinal tract, swollen glands, high blood pressure, vaginal bleeding and reduced arm movement where the shot was given.

Allergic reactions are rare but may include difficulty breathing, hives, and rash. See a health care provider immediately if a serious reaction occurs following vaccination.

Who should not get Gardasil®?

The vaccine should not be given to anyone who:

- has already been fully vaccinated with Gardasil®
- has had a bad reaction to a previous dose of Gardasil®
- is fighting an infection, unless it is a simple cold
- has an allergy to any of the ingredients (yeast, aluminium)
- has a complicated health condition
- is pregnant



For more information please call York Region Health Connection at **1-800-361-5653**.