

What is HPV?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a very common virus. 75% of Canadians will have at least one HPV infection during their lifetime. There are several types of HPV. Some cause warts. Others cause cervical changes including cervical cancer.

What is the HPV Vaccine?

Two HPV vaccines, Gardasil and Cervarix, have been approved for use in Canada. Gardasil provides protection against four types of HPV: 16, 18, 6 and 11. Cervarix provides protection against two types of HPV: 16 and 18. HPV 16 and 18 cause over 70% of all cervical cancers. HPV 6 and 11 cause 90% of all genital warts. Gardasil is given in three doses over six months. Neither Gardasil nor Cervarix can be used to treat existing HPV infection.

Who should get the vaccine?

Gardasil has been approved for use in females and males between the ages of 9 and 26. The National Advisory Committee on Immunization recommends the use of Gardasil for:

1. Females between 9 and 13 years of age before they start having sexual contact, and
2. Females between 14 and 26, who may:
 - have already been sexually active,
 - have been exposed to HPV infection, or
 - have already had previous Pap test abnormalities.

Who should not get the vaccine?

The use of Gardasil is not recommended for:

- females under the age of 9, or
- pregnant women.

What is the HPV Immunization Program?

In the 2008-2009 school year, Manitoba Health introduced a vaccine program for grade six girls. It is voluntary. The vaccine is given by public health nurses. Before any female student is immunized, parents and legal guardians receive:

- information about HPV and the vaccine, and
- a consent form.

How effective is Gardasil?

Gardasil is most effective when given to females before they start having sexual contact. If received before exposure to HPV 16, 18, 6 and 11, it will be almost 100% effective in preventing infection from these four types.

If you have previously been infected with one of these four types, the vaccine will still protect you against the remaining three types. The vaccine will not protect you against infection from other HPV types.

Do I still need Pap tests if I have had the vaccine?

Yes. You will still need to have regular Pap tests as the vaccine does not protect you against all types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer.

How safe is the vaccine?

Gardasil is safe. In recent studies, very few side effects were reported. The most common side effects were soreness, pain and swelling where the vaccine was injected.

In one study of 11,640 recipients, there were 5 reports of serious side effects that may have been due to the vaccine. These side effects were:

- bronchospasm (difficulty breathing),
- gastroenteritis (swelling of the stomach and intestines causing discomfort, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting and sometimes diarrhea),
- headache and hypertension (high blood pressure),
- vaginal hemorrhage (bleeding),
- injection site pain and difficulty in moving.

During this study, 10 people died. None of these deaths were considered to be vaccine-related. These deaths were caused by trauma, suicide, pulmonary embolus, infection, cancer, a complication of cesarean section, and an arrhythmia.



What is in the vaccine?

Gardasil contains proteins that act like the HPV virus. The body starts making antibodies and white blood cells to fight against these virus-like particles. This builds up immunity to the HPV virus as well. There is no active virus in the vaccine. Nor are there any antibiotics or preservatives, such as mercury or thimerosal.

Is there a cost for the vaccine?

Gardasil is free for grade six girls through the HPV Immunization Program. The vaccine is not free for females outside the program. You can buy the vaccine through your health centre. You may need a prescription. Talk to your doctor about how to get the vaccine.

Where do I find more information?

For the HPV Immunization Program,

- visit www.gov.mb.ca/health/hpv/, or
- call (204) 788-6737.

For the Gardasil vaccine, see

www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/ccdr-rmtc/07pdf/acs33-02.pdf

For more information on HPV, Pap tests, and the MCCSP,

- visit our website, www.TellEveryWoman.ca, or
- call us at 788-8626 or toll free at 1-866-616-8805.

Benefits	Limitations
Gardasil plays an important role in preventing HPV infections and genital warts.	The vaccines do not replace Pap tests.
The vaccine protects against HPV 16 and 18, which are responsible for over 70% of cervical cancers.	The vaccine does not protect against infection with other high-risk types that can also cause cancer of the cervix.
Gardasil protects against HPV 6 and 11 which are associated with 90% of genital warts.	The vaccine does not protect against infection with other low-risk HPV types.
The vaccine is very effective when given before first sexual activity. It can also be effective if given after first sexual activity, since it is rare for a woman to be infected with all four HPV types included in Gardasil.	The vaccine will not treat existing HPV infections.
The vaccine offers protection for at least five years.	A booster may be required for protection beyond five years.
The vaccine is safe and well tolerated. Few side effects have been reported, e.g., mild pain, redness, itching or swelling where the shot was given.	Rarely, other side effects include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • headache, fever, nausea or swelling of the throat and nose passages, • throat spasms, inflammation or infection of the gastrointestinal tract, swollen glands, high blood pressure, vaginal bleeding or reduced arm movement where the shot was given, or • allergic reactions such as difficult breathing, hives and rash.
The vaccine is given as a shot in the arm, easily administered by a doctor or nurse.	You must receive all three doses to be fully protected.
You cannot get HPV infection from the vaccine. It is not live and does not contain HPV; it contains virus-like particles.	

Adapted with permission from: Cancer Care Ontario, Ontario Cervical Screening Program (2008). HPV Vaccine: Helping you make an informed decision. Toronto, Ontario.

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Manitoba Cervical Cancer Screening Program
 Unit 5-25 Sherbrook St. Winnipeg, MB R3C 2B1
 788-8626 or 1-866-616-8805 www.TellEveryWoman.ca

