

# Help protect yourself

**The essential guide to the HPV vaccination  
for girls and boys aged 12 to 13**



Public Health  
Agency

# The essential guide to the HPV vaccination for girls and boys aged 12 to 13

This leaflet is about the vaccination (injection) that you can have to protect yourself against HPV-related cancers when you get older.

Since 2008, the HPV vaccine has been offered to all 12-13 year old girls in school years 9 and 10. Since September 2019, the vaccine has also been offered to boys in the same way. This is because the evidence is clear that the HPV vaccine helps protect both boys and girls from HPV-related cancers.

The HPV vaccine helps protect you from cancers that can be caused by HPV, such as:

- over 80% of cervical cancers (in women);
- some mouth and throat cancers;
- some cancers of the anus and genitals.

The vaccine will also protect you against the two types of HPV that cause the majority of cases of genital warts. It won't protect you against any other sexually transmitted infections and it won't stop girls getting pregnant.

## HPV and how it spreads

Human papillomavirus (HPV) infection is very common with as many as half the population infected with HPV some time in their lives. You can catch it through intimate sexual contact with another person who already has the virus.

There are over 100 types of HPV but only 13 of them are known to cause cancer. There are usually no symptoms, so many won't realise they are infected. Most of the time, the virus does not cause cancer because it is killed off by the body's immune system, but not always - some infections persist and lead to cancer or genital warts - this is why the vaccine is so important.

## The HPV vaccine

The HPV vaccine is used in 121 countries and over 80 million people have received the vaccine worldwide.

The vaccine is already having a major impact on HPV infections in the UK, Australia and Denmark. In time it is expected that the vaccine will save hundreds of lives every year.

It is best to have the vaccine before you become sexually active. However, if you are sexually active it is still important to get the vaccine. It is recommended that you have the vaccination at 12 to 13 years of age to protect you as early as possible.



## Having the vaccination

You will need two injections to get the best protection. The first dose is usually given in Year 9 and the second dose 6-12 months later. However, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) has indicated that the interval between the first and second dose can be extended by a number of years without compromising protection or the boosting effect of the second dose. Like the vaccinations you had as a baby, it is important that you complete the course and have both doses for it to work properly.

Your school health team will arrange for you to have the vaccination in Year 9 at school. You will also be offered the vaccine in Year 10 if you didn't receive it the year before. The nurse will give you the vaccination in your upper arm.

If you suffer from asthma, eczema, hay fever or other allergies, you can still have the vaccine. If you have any concerns about this, speak to the nurse before having the vaccine.



## Side effects

The side effects of the vaccination are quite mild - usually just soreness, swelling and redness in the arm, which soon wears off. Other less common side effects may include headache, nausea, dizziness and/or mild fever.

Very rarely, some people have a reaction soon after the injection, like a rash. The nurse will know how to treat this. It is not a reason not to have more injections for HPV or other diseases.

Severe allergic reactions are very rare and nurses are trained to deal with them. People recover completely with treatment, usually within a few hours.

The vaccine meets the rigorous safety standards required for it to be used in the UK and other European countries. Millions of doses of vaccine have already been given in the UK and around the world. As with all vaccines, reports of side effects are closely monitored and reviewed.



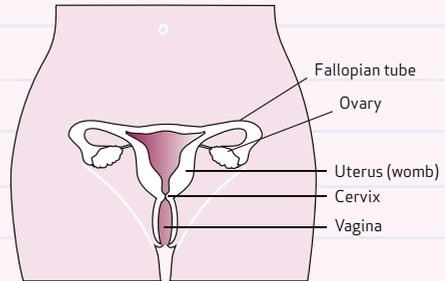
## Women and cervical cancer screening

Gardasil® 4 has been the HPV vaccine used in the Northern Ireland vaccination programme since 2012. This will switch to Gardasil® 9 in 2022.

Gardasil® 9 protects against nine types of HPV, including types 16 and 18, which cause most cases of cervical cancer (over 80%).

Cervical cancer occurs in the cervix (the entrance to the womb – see diagram below). Cervical cancer can be very serious and around 20 women die from it in Northern Ireland each year.

The vaccine does not protect you against all the other types of HPV, so girls will still need to have cervical screening (smear tests) when they are older.



## Other cancers

There are currently no screening programmes for other HPV-related cancers. If you are worried about any symptoms contact your GP.

## Missed your appointment?

Don't worry, you will either be seen again in school or the school health team will contact your parents to arrange another appointment.

## Giving consent

You will have been given a consent form that one of your parents should sign giving permission for you to have the vaccination. It's important that you return the signed form before your vaccination is due.

If your parents are not sure that you should have the vaccination you should still return the form and speak to your school health team or your GP. Having the vaccination now will reduce your risk of getting a HPV-related cancer and protect girls against the most common causes of cervical cancer for many years.

## More information

Your parents will have received a question and answer booklet that provides more detailed information on giving consent and the other topics covered in this leaflet. This information can also be downloaded from [pha.site/hpv](http://pha.site/hpv)

To get the leaflet or the Q&A in another language visit [pha.site/hpv](http://pha.site/hpv) or ask your school nurse to print you a copy.





For more information see [pha.site/hpv](http://pha.site/hpv)



## Public Health Agency

### Public Health Agency

12-22 Linenhall Street, Belfast BT2 8BS.

Tel: 0300 555 0114 (local rate).

[www.publichealth.hscni.net](http://www.publichealth.hscni.net)

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