



Fact Sheet

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine – Gardasil

1. What is HPV and the complications of an illness caused by HPV?

HPV is a highly contagious virus that is spread by skin-to-skin contact. It can infect the skin, mouth, rectum, anus, cervix, the skin on the penis, the area around the vagina and the lining of the vagina. HPV is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections in Canada. It is estimated that 75% of Canadians will have at least one HPV infection over their lifetime. While most HPV infections go away on their own some remain and create a risk for cervical cancer.

There are over 100 types of HPV and some can lead to various health problems such as warts on the hands and feet, genital warts, cervical cancer and cancer of the vulva, anus and penis. HPV is linked to almost all cases of cervical cancer. About 290,000 women die worldwide each year, including 400 in Canada. Each year an average of seven women are diagnosed with cervical cancer on PEI.

2. What is HPV Vaccine and what does it contain?

The HPV vaccine is an inactive (dead) vaccine that helps protect against the diseases caused by HPV types 6, 11, 16 and 18. It works best when given before the person becomes sexually active. It can prevent an infection from HPV that occurs in girls as young as 9 years of age. A **series of three doses** is recommended at intervals of 0, 1-2, and 6 months. It is not yet known how long protection will last after immunization but at present no boosters are necessary.

The vaccine contains highly purified inactive proteins from HPV types 6, 11, 16 and 18. When administered it causes the body to make antibodies against these HPV types. The vaccine also contains traces of amorphous aluminum hydroxyphosphate sulphate (to improve the body's ability to form antibodies), sodium chloride and water for injection. There is no mercury in the vaccine.

This vaccine provides protection against 70% of HPV that cause cervical cancer and 90% of HPV that cause genital warts.

3. *What are the possible reactions from the vaccine?*

The most serious but rare side effect is a severe allergic reaction (anaphylaxis) which can be life threatening and usually occurs within 15-20 minutes of receiving the vaccine. Procedures are in place for the nurse to quickly respond to anaphylaxis. Those who receive the vaccine are asked to **remain in the waiting area for 15 minutes after immunization.**

The most common side effect is soreness around the injection site. Minor side effects may include localized swelling, redness and itching at the injection site. Other side effects may include headache, fever, dizziness and/or nausea.

**See a doctor or seek medical attention if your child has any serious side effects.
Report serious reactions to the public health nurse whenever they occur.**

It is not necessary to give acetaminophen (e.g., Tylenol or Tempra) with every immunization. However, if your child is experiencing discomfort or fever, acetaminophen can relieve these symptoms.

4. *When should the vaccine not be given?*

- 1) Those who are allergic to any contents of the vaccine **should not receive** this vaccine.
- 2) Those who had an anaphylactic reaction after getting a previous dose of the vaccine.
- 3) Those who are ill and have a fever above 38.5°C (or 101.3°F) should return for their immunization at a later date.

5. *What are the risks if the vaccine is not received?*

HPV infection is very common, and some types of HPV create a risk for cervical cancer. While most HPV infections go away by themselves, those that persist are more likely to develop into cancer. Warts caused by the virus can be treated. However, they are difficult to remove and often come back after treatment.

6. *Should those who receive HPV vaccine have pap smears done in the future?*

Yes, those who have received the vaccine should have pap smears done at the appropriate age, similar to women who have not received the vaccine. This is because the vaccine provides protection against 70% of those human papillomaviruses that cause cervical cancer, and a woman can become infected with one or more of the other 30% of these viruses that do cause cervical cancer.