

What is human papillomavirus (HPV) and how do you get it?

What are the symptoms of HPV?

How can I protect myself?

### How much does the vaccine cost?

The vaccine is very expensive, around \$360 for all three injections. However, if you are insured, your insurance may cover the costs. If you are 18 years of age or younger and meet one of the following qualifications, you are eligible to receive the vaccine from the state at no cost:

- Are eligible for Medicaid,
- Have no health insurance,
- Are Native American or Alaskan Native, or
- Have health insurance, but it does not cover the cost of vaccines.

If you are uninsured, apply through your local department of social services to find out if you qualify for Health Check/Medicaid or NC Health Choice insurance. This will help you pay for vaccine administration fees and other health care services you need.

Some of the questions above were adapted from the CDC website at [www.cdc.gov/STD/HPV/](http://www.cdc.gov/STD/HPV/).

# HPV

## Information for Young Women between 11-18 Years Old



State of North Carolina  
Department of Health and Human Services  
[www.ncdhhs.gov](http://www.ncdhhs.gov)

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## *What is human papillomavirus (HPV) and how do you get it?*

HPV is a common virus that is spread through sexual contact. HPV can be spread even if there is no intercourse. Most of the time, HPV has no symptoms, so people do not know they have it. There are many different strains or types of HPV. Some types can cause cervical cancer in women. Other types of HPV can cause genital warts.

Most sexually active people, (at least 50%) get HPV at some time in their lives, although most never know it because HPV usually has no symptoms and goes away on its own. However, while a person is infected with HPV, they can spread the virus to other sex partners, often without even realizing it. HPV is most common in young women and men who are in their late teens and early 20s.

## *What are the symptoms of HPV?*

Some people will develop visible growths or bumps in the genital area (called genital warts). The virus lives in the body and usually causes no symptoms. Most men and women who have HPV do not know they are infected.

## *How can I protect myself from getting HPV?*

The only sure protection from HPV is lifelong abstinence or a monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner. However, a new vaccine can now protect females (ages 9 to 26) from four major types of HPV. These

include two types that cause about 70% of cervical cancer and two types that cause about 90% of genital warts. HPV vaccine can prevent most genital warts and most cases of cervical cancer.

## *Should I get the HPV vaccine?*

Doctors recommend this vaccine be given to females between 9 and 26 years old. Ideally, girls should get this vaccine before they have any sexual contact where they could be exposed to HPV. This is because the vaccine has the best chance of being 100% effective if given before the girl or young woman has any exposure to the HPV virus.

The vaccine is given as a series of three shots over six months. The best protection is achieved after all three shots are given.

## *Is the HPV vaccine safe?*

**Yes.** Studies show that the vaccine is extremely safe. This vaccine has been studied in thousands of girls and women in the United States and around the world. These studies have shown no serious side effects. The most common side effect is soreness where the shot is given (in the arm).

## *What if my parent has a problem with me getting the vaccine?*

Talk to your parent or guardian, or ask your doctor or nurse to do so. The vaccine is designed to offer lifelong protection against HPV, but it is not meant to encourage sexual activity. It is simply meant as a preventative

measure, and the earlier it is given, the more likely it is to provide the best protection against cervical cancer. The vaccine will not only protect you now, but it will also protect you when you're older. Please remember that the cervical cancer vaccine does not protect against other sexually transmitted infections. You must still make thoughtful and careful choices about sexual activity. Ask your parent to learn and read more about HPV and the vaccine. HPV is very common, and very few people know when they have it. Receiving HPV vaccine is a way to protect yourself against cervical cancer and genital warts in the years to come.

## *Can I get the vaccine without my parent's permission?*

**Technically, yes.** If you are under 18 years of age, or you rely on your parent's health-care coverage, and a parent refuses to pay for or okay the vaccine when you want it for yourself, in North Carolina you still have the legal right to get it if you want. Talk to your doctor or clinician about this conflict.

