



Drug FAQs for Members

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Human Papillomavirus (types 6, 11, 16, 18) Vaccine - Gardasil®

What is HPV (human papillomavirus)?

HPV is a common virus that can cause genital warts and cancer. HPV is spread by sexual contact. There are about 100 types of HPV, some that are associated with genital warts, while certain other types can lead to cervical cancer. HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. It is estimated that over 50% of people will get HPV at some time although most infections are without symptoms and can clear by themselves.

What is HPV vaccine?

- In June 2006, the first vaccine to prevent cancer was approved for use in the United States. Gardasil® is the first vaccine developed to prevent cervical cancer, precancerous genital lesions, and genital warts due to the most common HPV types that lead to these diseases.
- Within a year, another vaccine similar to Gardasil should become available. It will protect against the same two common HPV types that can lead to cervical cancer but not the HPV types that commonly cause genital warts.

How is the vaccine given?

Gardasil is given as 3 doses: the first dose is followed by a second dose 2 months later, and a third dose 6 months after the first dose. There is not enough information on the effectiveness of the vaccine if it is administered on a different schedule. It is important to receive all doses as scheduled by your provider.

At this time, we know that the vaccine is fully protective for at least 5 years. The length of vaccine protection will continue to be researched.

Is HPV vaccine effective? Can I still get HPV if I have been vaccinated?

Gardasil is very effective in preventing four types of HPV in young women who have not been previously exposed. The vaccine targets four types of HPV that cause 70% of all cervical cancer and 90% of genital warts. The vaccine will not treat HPV infection that is already present or its complications.

The vaccine covers the most common types of HPV but does not provide protection against all types of HPV. The extent of protection is not known if you receive less than three doses of the vaccine. Even if you are vaccinated with all 3 doses of the series, it is possible to get genital warts and/or abnormal cells that can eventually lead to cancer. That is why women will still need regular cervical cancer screening, even after they have received the HPV vaccine.

Is HPV vaccine safe?

In clinical studies, Gardasil was tested in thousands of girls and women (9 to 26 years of age). There were no serious side effects. The most common side effect is mild pain at the site where the vaccine is given.

The HPV vaccine is not recommended in pregnancy. So far, studies have shown that the small number of women who received the vaccine during pregnancy did not experience an increase in health problems during pregnancy nor did it cause an increase in health problems to the babies. However for now, it is recommended that pregnant women wait until after their baby is born to receive the vaccine.

Who should get the vaccine?

A National panel of experts, the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices, has recommended routine vaccination for girls 11-12 years of age.

- This recommendation also allows for vaccination of all girls and women between 9 and 26 years of age.
- It is preferred that all three doses of the vaccine be given before girls become sexually active. Once sexual activity has begun, within two years there is a 50% chance that HPV infection has occurred; this might make the vaccine not work as well.

Studies are now being performed in boys and men. If the research shows that the vaccine is also safe and effective in boys and men, the FDA will consider licensing the vaccine for them also.

Is there a treatment for HPV infection?

Genital Warts: Treating genital warts is often difficult and often takes more than one course of treatment or different treatments. Your provider may remove them, give you medicine to remove them, or both.

Abnormal Cells in the Cervix: A routine PAP smear can detect abnormal cells in the cervix. A procedure is done to remove them if they are found. If these abnormal cells are not detected and treated, it can eventually lead to cervical cancer.

Is the vaccine available at Kaiser Permanente?

Kaiser Permanente is in the process of reviewing all evidence to date in order to determine which of our members will benefit most. Expect Gardasil to be available for appropriate members in the Fall, 2006.