

## **HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) and The HPV Vaccine**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

#### **1. What is HPV?**

HPV is the abbreviation for a common virus called human papillomavirus. There are more than 100 sub-types of HPV. Most of the sub-sub-types are relatively harmless, like the ones that cause common warts found on hands and feet. About 30 sub-types of HPV affect the genital area (cervix, vagina, vulva and anus). For most women, the body's own defense system will clear the virus. But for some, cervical cancer can develop.

#### **2. Which sub-types of HPV cause more serious consequences?**

Of the 30 sub-types of HPV that affect the genital area, a certain number are “high-risk” and can cause abnormal cells, including cancer. Other HPV sub-types cause genital warts and benign (non-cancerous) changes in the cervix, vagina, vulva and anus. All sub-types of genital HPV can cause abnormal Pap tests.

#### **3. How common is HPV?**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that approximately 20 million American men and women have genital HPV infections. The CDC also estimates that at least 50% of sexually active people will get genital HPV during their lifetime. More than 6 million new cases of genital HPV are diagnosed in the United States every year.

#### **4. How would I get HPV?**

Women and men who have any kind of sexual activity involving genital contact with an infected person can get human papillomavirus (HPV). That means it's possible to get genital HPV without having intercourse. And, because many people who have the virus may not show any signs or symptoms, they can transmit the virus without even knowing it.

#### **5. How will I know if I have HPV?**

Most women learn they have HPV as a result of abnormal Pap tests. A Pap test (also known as a Pap smear) is part of a gynecological exam that can help detect abnormal cells in the lining of the cervix before they have the chance to become pre-cancer or cancer. Virtually all cases of cervical pre-cancer are related to HPV and can be treated successfully, if detected early. It's also important to note that cervical cancer is preventable. That's why it's very important to follow your doctor's advice regarding how often you should have a Pap test. Women over the age of 30 are offered screening for HPV along with their pap smear. It is possible to have an infection with the HPV virus, despite a normal pap smear.

#### **6. How can I avoid HPV?**

The HPV virus is very contagious. Warts and HPV virus can be transmitted by any skin-to-skin contact during oral, vaginal, or anal sex with an infected partner. About two-thirds of people who have sexual contact with a person with genital warts will develop warts, usually within 3 months. The only way to avoid HPV is avoidance of any sexual contact with an infected partner. The next best

way is condom use. We now have a vaccination against the most common types of HPV. All women between the ages of nine and twenty-seven should be vaccinated.

### **7. What are genital warts?**

Genital warts are flesh-colored growths that appear on the external genital area or near the anus of both men and women. Although less common, they can also appear inside the vagina and on the cervix, and they sometimes have symptoms like burning, itching, or pain. Genital warts can also have an emotional effect, causing people to feel uncomfortable in new or existing relationships.

### **8. What causes genital warts?**

Genital warts are caused by certain "low-risk" sub-types of human papillomavirus (HPV). The sub-types of HPV that can cause genital warts are different from the "high-risk" sub-types that can cause cervical cancer.

### **9. What is GARDASIL?**

GARDASIL is a vaccine that helps protect against the following diseases caused by human papillomavirus

- Cervical cancer
- Abnormal and precancerous cervical lesions
- Abnormal and precancerous vaginal lesions
- Abnormal and precancerous vulva lesions
- Genital warts

### **10: Who should get this vaccine?**

The CDC (Centers for Disease Control) recommends the vaccine be given to girls ages 11-12. The vaccine can be given to girls as young as 9 years and up to 26 years of age, if they have not yet received the vaccine series.

### **11: How effective is the vaccine?**

Studies on the vaccine have shown it to be 100% effective in protecting against the four major "high-risk" HPV strains (HPV 6, 11, 16, 18).

### **12: How is the vaccine given?**

The vaccine is a series of three injections given over a 6-month period.

### **13: Does insurance company cover the cost? If not what is the cost?**

While some insurance companies may cover the vaccine, others may not. Check with your own insurance company to learn if Gardasil is a covered benefit. The retail cost of each injection is \$185 (\$555 for the required series). The office visit is normally a covered benefit and varies with each policy.