

Family Medicine Clerkship  
Plain Language Summary

**Title:** The HPV Vaccine

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**Plain Language Summary:**

The human papillomavirus (HPV) is a virus that causes some genital and oral warts, as well as cervical cancer. HPV can be spread by sexual contact with a partner carrying the virus. At least 50% of sexually-active people will have HPV at some point in their lives. Using a condom can help prevent the spread of HPV, but not completely.

**Gardasil** is a vaccine that can protect you against the two most common types of HPV that cause warts (HPV types 6 and 11) and the two most common types that cause cervical cancer (HPV types 16 and 18).

**Cervarix** is another vaccine that can protect against HPV types 16 and 18 only - the two most common types that cause cervical cancer.

The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) makes recommendations about vaccines based on scientific knowledge. The CDC recommends that girls ages 11-12 get the 3 doses of the HPV vaccine. Girls as young as 9 can get the vaccine if they want. And girls 13-26 should get the vaccine if they didn't already. Many insurance plans pay for, or help pay for, the vaccine in people 9-26.

**Why do children need to get the vaccine at a young age?**

The vaccine is most effective before any exposure to HPV. Since HPV is spread by sexual contact, a person will get the most benefit if they complete all 3 doses of the vaccine before beginning sexual activity.

**Can boys get the HPV vaccine too?**

Yes. Men do not have a cervix (the opening of a woman's uterus), or risk of cervical cancer, but they can still get oral and genital warts or cancers from HPV. Also, men can spread HPV to their female partners. The CDC says that Gardasil HPV vaccine is approved for boys 9-26 years old.

**Can I get the HPV vaccine if I am over 26?**

Yes. You may have to pay for it yourself, because most insurance plans do not cover the vaccine for people over age 26. The HPV vaccine works best in young people before they begin having sex. It is less effective in older people who are sexually-active because they may have already been exposed to HPV.

**Is the vaccine safe?**

Yes. All medicines and vaccines have some side effects, but the two HPV vaccines have been tested around the world in thousands of people without any serious side effects.

**Additional Resources:**

The CDC

<http://www.cdc.gov/hpv/>

Medline

HPV <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/hpv.html>

HPV Vaccine <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/ency/article/007436.htm>

Information in Spanish

En Español

<http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/spanish/hpv.html>

<http://www.cdc.gov/std/Spanish/STDFact-HPV-s.htm>

[http://www.cdc.gov/spanish/cancer/cervical/pdf/cervical\\_facts\\_sp.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/spanish/cancer/cervical/pdf/cervical_facts_sp.pdf)

**Key Words:**

HPV

Human Papillomavirus

Vaccine

Cervical Cancer

Prevention

Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level 5.8

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