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Human papillomavirus (HPV)

Human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine is offered to girls and boys aged 12–13 years as part of the UK immunisation schedule. It protects against cancer of the neck of the womb (cervical cancer) and some vaginal and anal cancers.

Vaccination is also offered to men who have sex with men, up to the age of 45 years.

It will be injected into a muscle in your upper arm or thigh.

The most common side-effects are tenderness at the site of the injection and headache. These should soon pass.

About human papillomavirus vaccine

Type of medicine	Human papillomavirus vaccine
Used for	Prevention of cervical cancer and genital warts caused by human papillomavirus
Also called	Gardasil 9®
Available as	Intramuscular injection

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the name given to a group of viruses that can affect the skin and the moist membranes that line different parts of your body such as your mouth, throat and genital area. There are many types of HPV. Most types of the virus do not cause any symptoms and will be cleared completely from your body by your immune system. Some types of HPV, however, are known to increase the risk of developing particular cancers. In particular, types HPV16 and HPV18 are known to be involved in the development of most cases of **cervical cancer (cancer of the neck of the womb)**. Two other types of HPV (types HPV6 and HPV11) are the cause of most cases of **genital warts**, a common **sexually transmitted infection**.

The HPV vaccine currently available in the UK is called Gardasil 9®. Gardasil 9® protects against 9 different strains of HPV, including HPV16 and HPV18, which means that it offers protection against certain cervical, vaginal and anal cancers as well as genital warts.

It is currently recommended in the UK that HPV vaccine is given to girls and boys aged 12–13 years as part of the routine immunisation schedule. Immunisation takes place in schools using the Gardasil 9® vaccine. Young people who were not immunised at school are still eligible for vaccination up to the age of 25.

HPV vaccine can also be given to men who have sex with men (MSM) if they go to a sexual health clinic. MSM are eligible for vaccination up to the age of 45 years.

Before having human papillomavirus vaccine

Some medicines are not suitable for people with certain conditions, and sometimes a medicine may only be used if extra care is taken. For these reasons, before having HPV vaccine it is important that your nurse or doctor knows:

- If you feel unwell or have a high temperature.
- If you could be pregnant.
- If you have been told you have a weakened immune system. This may be a result of an illness or taking medicines.
- If you have a condition that makes you bleed more than is normal, such as haemophilia.

- If you have ever had an allergic reaction to a medicine. You should not have the vaccine if you have had an allergic reaction to a previous HPV vaccine.
- If you are taking any other medicines. This includes any medicines you are taking which are available to buy without a prescription, as well as herbal and complementary medicines. Taking the contraceptive pill does not interfere with the vaccine.

How human papillomavirus vaccine is given

- Before you have the vaccine, ask to read the manufacturer's printed information leaflet from inside the pack. The manufacturer's leaflet will give you more information about the vaccine and a full list of side-effects which you may experience from it.
- From 1st September 2023 the UK vaccination programme consists of a single dose of Gardasil 9®. The vaccine is given by injection into your upper arm or thigh.
- For childhood immunisation the dose is given to children aged 12–13 years. In practice, this often means that the vaccine is given during school year 8 (or S1 in Scotland or 9 in Northern Ireland).
- Children who received a first dose of Gardasil 9® in 2022–23 are now considered to be fully vaccinated and will not require their scheduled second dose.

Getting the most from your treatment

- If you have a high temperature (fever) or you are acutely unwell at the time of a scheduled immunisation, your doctor or nurse may recommend delaying the vaccine. A minor illness (such as a common cold) will not interfere with the vaccine. If a delay is advised, you will be given an alternative appointment for the vaccination to be given.
- The HPV vaccine will not prevent every case of cervical cancer. Women should still attend for regular cervical screening tests, even if they have received the HPV vaccine.

Can human papillomavirus vaccine cause problems?

Along with their useful effects, vaccines like most medicines can cause unwanted side-effects, although not everyone experiences them. HPV vaccine often causes no problems, but the table below contains some of the side-effects which may occur. You will find a full list in the manufacturer's information leaflet supplied with your medicine. Speak with your doctor or pharmacist if any of the following side-effects continue or become troublesome.

Common human papillomavirus vaccine side-effects	What can I do if I experience this?
Pain, swelling, redness, bruising or itching around the site of the injection	This should soon pass
Headache	Drink plenty of water and, if troublesome, take a dose of a suitable painkiller
Feeling tired, dizziness, raised temperature (mild fever)	This should soon pass
Feeling sick (nausea), tummy (abdominal) pain	Eat simple meals - avoid rich or spicy meals. Drink plenty of water

If you experience any other symptoms which you think may be due to the vaccine, speak with your doctor, nurse or pharmacist.

How to store human papillomavirus vaccine

- It is unlikely that you will be asked to store the vaccine before it is given to you. If, however, this does happen, keep it refrigerated until it is needed.
- Keep all medicines out of the reach and sight of children.

Important information about all medicines

If you are having an operation or any dental treatment, tell the person carrying out the treatment which medicines you are taking.

If you have any questions about this medicine, ask your pharmacist.

If you experience side effects, you can report them online through the [Yellow Card website](#).

Further reading

- [Human papillomavirus \(HPV\): the green book, chapter 18a](#); UK Health Security Agency, last updated 31 March 2022
- [Medicines Complete BNF 87th Edition](#); British Medical Association and Royal Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain, London.
- [Changes to the vaccine of the HPV immunisation programme: Letter](#); NHS England and NHS Improvement Director of Public Health Commissioning and Operations and Public Health England, Head of Immunisation; GOV.UK, July 2021
- [Manufacturer's PIL, Gardasil® 9](#); Merck Sharp and Dohme Limited, The electronic Medicines Compendium. Dated July 2022.

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