

Frequently asked questions for teachers

Young people are likely to have lots of questions about the HPV vaccine! We have compiled commonly asked questions by young people and our suggested responses in the table below.

Topic: HPV and related illness

Q: How does someone know if they have HPV?

A: There are no symptoms of HPV. Most of the time people don't even know they have had HPV or have any health problems because of it. Symptoms related to cancer may present after many years.

Q: Will condoms stop someone getting HPV?

A: Not always.

- This is because HPV can infect parts of the body not covered by a condom and can be passed on without having penetrative sex.
- Because HPV is spread from skin-to-skin contact, condoms are not very effective at stopping people getting HPV.
- The best way to get protected from HPV is by having the vaccine.

Topic: HPV vaccine

Q: Are there any disadvantages of getting the vaccine?

A: As with any medication, there is always the risk of side-effects. Most people experience a small amount of pain at the vaccination site. But they don't need to worry, it's over really quickly!

- Sometime people may find their arm is a bit sore that day, but by the next day it should be fine.
- They may notice their vaccination site is a little bit red and their arm is a bit achy for the rest of the day. That's normal too and shows their body is having an

immune response to the vaccine. Around one in ten people who receive the HPV vaccine will experience these side effects.

- Afterwards it might be a bit bumpy and sore, but they'll be all right in a day or two
- Remember, the HPV vaccine offers protection against much more serious health problems.
- Around 1 in 100 people will experience nausea.
- For more detailed information about side-effects, please see this website:
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/vaccinations/hpv-vaccine-cervarix-gardasil-side-effects/>

Q: Are there any more serious problems related to having the HPV vaccine?

A: These are very rare. The immunisation team are trained to spot and deal with any more serious problems.

The HPV is one of the safest vaccines available. However, around one in a million young people may have an allergic reaction to the vaccine. The nurses are trained to deal with this and carry medication to treat this immediately, if this happens.

Q: What is in the vaccine?

A: The vaccine contains particles which look like the outside of the real HPV. It also contains some other ingredients to keep the vaccine suitable for injection. The vaccine does not contain pork or gelatine.

Q: Can someone catch the cancer from the vaccine?

A: No. The vaccine does not contain live or killed viruses. That means it cannot cause cancer or other HPV-related illnesses.

Q: Will someone need another vaccine in the future to fully protect themselves when they are an adult?

A: The most recent research studies show that the HPV vaccine gives protection for at least 14 years. Individuals can be infected with HPV many times but their body will keep fighting with an immune response.

There is no evidence that immunity reduces over time, but more research studies are being carried which will help show much longer the vaccine gives you protection from HPV.

Q: How big is the needle?

A: It's really small. It's the same size needle for each injection that's given. It's best not to pay attention to what other people in schools are saying about the size of the needle.

Q: Does it hurt?

A: Not very much. It's a sharp scratch for hardly any time at all. Then the individual will know they're protected against the main types of HPV.

Q: Someone who is 12 years old may not even be thinking about sex yet. Why do they need this vaccine?

A: It is important that somebody has the vaccine before they have been exposed to the virus. Even if they don't think they need the vaccine right now, it's best that they get the vaccine at 12 years old so they definitely get the best protection.

When someone is younger, they have a better immune response. This means they will have a higher level of protection from being vaccinated.

It's really easy to get the vaccine. The school will make all the arrangements with the immunisation team so that everybody can get the vaccine.

Topic: HPV vaccination programme

Q: Why are boys being offered the vaccine now?

A: In England, young women were first offered the HPV vaccine in 2008. This was to help protect young women from developing cervical cancer. There is now more scientific evidence which shows that men can also be affected by cancers that are caused by HPV.

In 2019, the government decided to offer young men the vaccine as well so they can benefit from protection against HPV.

Q: If someone's parents don't want them to have the vaccine, but they do. What can they do?

A: By law, young people under the age of 16 are allowed to consent to medical treatments, including vaccines, as long as they fully understood what is involved and are confident about their decision.

If at all possible, it is best that parents and young people decide about having the HPV vaccine together. However, if this isn't possible, the young person should talk to their immunisation nurse who can advise them.

Q: If someone misses the vaccine at school, can they still get the vaccine?

A: If a young person (both male and female) didn't get the vaccine at school when they were offered it, they can get the vaccine at their GP or other community settings until they are 25 years old.

Men-who-have-sex-with-men can get the HPV vaccine from HIV and sexual health clinics until they are aged 45 years.

Topic: HPV vaccination session

Q: When do Year 8 students get the vaccine?

A: The school will let everyone know when the immunisation team are coming to give the HPV vaccine. They will also let everyone know which room in the school they will need to go to.

Q: Does a young person need permission from their parents to be vaccinated?

A: By law, young people under the age of 16 are allowed to consent to medical treatments, including vaccines, as long as they fully understood what is involved and are confident about their decision.

If at all possible, it is best that parents and young people decide about having the HPV vaccine together. However, if this isn't possible, the young person should talk to their immunisation nurse who can advise them.

Q: How long will it take?

A: The process is very short. It should only take a few seconds to have the vaccine.

Q: What should someone wear on the day of the vaccination session?

A: It's helpful to wear a short sleeved top for easy access to the arm. If the person is wearing a long-sleeved top, the immunisation team will make sure that person's privacy is respected when they have the vaccine.

Q: Where will the injection be given?

A: The HPV vaccine will be given in the muscle at the top of the arm. It is very similar to the COVID-19 vaccine that some young people may have had.

It's a good idea to have the vaccine in the opposite arm to the one that is used to write with. Young people can let the nurse know if they would prefer to have it on their left or right arm.

Q: Can someone have the vaccine in a different way? (e.g. spray)

A: It is not possible to have the HPV vaccine in a different way. That is because the best way for the HPV vaccine to be given is through an injection in the muscle at the top of the arm (intramuscularly).

Q: What can help someone who is feeling nervous about getting the vaccine?

A: They shouldn't worry. It won't be as bad as lots of people think and the nurses are really nice. The worst bit is waiting around for the vaccine beforehand.

If someone is feeling a bit nervous they could tell their teacher to see if they can have the vaccine before the other students. It can help if they take some big

deep breaths to keep them feeling calm and distract them. Or they could try counting backwards from 100.

Q: What happens after someone has had the vaccine?

A: Once someone has had the vaccine, they will be able to carry on their day as normal. They won't need to take a day off school the following day.

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