

Women vaccinated against HPV

MAKE AN INFORMED CHOICE

PREVENTING INFECTIONS AND
CANCERS IN:

- **Young women (aged 18-26 years)**
- **Women treated for HPV-related lesions**
- **Women with HIV infection**





WHAT IS HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV)?

It is a group of very common viruses. There are over 100 serotypes of the HPV, about 40 of which can cause infection in the genital tract of women and men. HPV infections are usually transient and asymptomatic - the infected person does not know that he/she is infected - and in most cases they clear up on their own. Some HPV serotypes can cause genital warts while other high-risk (cancer-causing) serotypes can cause cell changes in the mucous membranes of the cervix, vulva, vagina, anus, penis and oropharynx and, if they persist and are not treated, in some cases they can develop cancer. It can take many years for an infection to progress to cancer.

WHAT ARE HIGH-RISK HPV_s AND WHAT DO THEY CAUSE?

HPV types 16 and 18 are predominantly associated with cancer and they cause 70% of cervical cancers. Along with HPV serotypes 31, 33, 45, 52 and 58 they cause 90% of cervical cancers and about 80% of other HPV-related cancers. Cervical cancer was the first cancer type to be attributed to viral infection by the World Health Organization (WHO).

HOW IS HPV TRANSMITTED?

HPV is transmitted through direct genital skin-to-skin or skin-to-mucosa contact especially during sex, including incomplete sexual intercourse. It is the most common sexually transmitted infection. Condoms reduce but do not prevent transmission of the virus which could be present on other skin portions not protected by the condom.



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HOW CAN HPV INFECTION BE DIAGNOSED AND TREATED?

There is no specific treatment for HPV infection. However to prevent or early detect cell changes in the cervix caused by HPV, it is necessary to undergo regular screening through HPV test or PAP test.

In this way it is possible to early detect abnormal changes in cervical mucous membranes. No screening programmes exist for the other sites – vulva, vagina, anus, penis and oropharynx. So if you think you may be at risk of infection, talk to your health care provider or a specialist doctor.

IS HPV VACCINE SAFE? WHAT IS IT MADE OF?

The vaccine is safe. It does not contain any live virus, so it cannot cause the infection, but it can produce an immune response to the virus. All trials carried out so far, as well as the post-marketing surveillance systems of all European and non-European countries have confirmed that the vaccine is well tolerated. Millions of people have been vaccinated against HPV and no serious adverse events have been reported. Common side effects include pain and redness at the site of injection, fever, nausea, dizziness, headache and joint pain.

IS THE VACCINE EFFECTIVE?

Yes, the vaccine is effective. No HPV test is required before vaccination. Recent studies have demonstrated that the vaccine can prevent recurrence in women who were exposed to the virus and developed pre-cancerous or cancerous lesions, if administered within 12 months from treatment.



DOES HPV VACCINE PREVENT INFECTIONS?

The vaccine prevents infection from HPV serotypes contained in it and thus it prevents abnormal cell changes which may lead to cancer.

HOW LONG IS THE VACCINE GOOD FOR?

Studies suggest that the antibodies stay in the body for many years, probably for the whole life. As at today, no booster shot is recommended after the basic schedule.

WHO SHOULD GET VACCINATED?

The vaccine prevents the infection but doesn't treat it. **Thus it should be given before a person may be potentially exposed to the virus, meaning before starting sexual activity.** If a girl or boy has already had contact with the virus types contained in the vaccine, the vaccine will be less effective. **The vaccine has proven to be effective also in adults,** although its effectiveness decreases with age, simply because the likelihood of contact with HPV viruses is much higher due to sexual activity. Recent studies on HPV have also demonstrated that **the vaccine is very important for women who were exposed to the virus and developed cancerous lesions,** as it can prevent recurrence if administered within 12 months from removal of cancerous lesions.

WHERE AND HOW CAN I GET VACCINATED?

You can get vaccinated at the vaccination offices of the local health authorities. Under 15 years of age, the schedule includes two doses, whereas from 15 years you will get three doses. The vaccine is administered intramuscularly, usually in the deltoid region of the upper arm.



WHAT DOES THE REGIONAL HEALTH SERVICE OFFER TO ADULT WOMEN?

The vaccine currently used in the Emilia Romagna region is effective against 9 HPV types (6, 11, 16, 18, 31, 33, 45, 52, 58) and protects from about 90% of cervical cancers, approx. 80% of other HPV-related cancers and almost 100% of genital warts.

Vaccination is provided for free:

- **to young women under 26 who have not been vaccinated for HPV; since 2019, 25 years old women receive an invitation letter for free vaccination;**
- **to women under 65 with a documented history of treatment of severe cervical lesions (CIN2+) over the last 12 months;**
- **to women with HIV infection upon request.**

All other adults can however get vaccinated at the vaccination offices of the local health authorities at a preferential price. The price paid by users is much lower than the one applied by private centres and corresponds to the mere cost of the vaccine paid by the local health authority plus the vaccination fee applied according to the regional price list. For more information contact the SISP (Public Health and Hygiene Service), a Counselling centre or your health care provider and/or gynaecologist.

CAN I BE VACCINATED DURING PREGNANCY?

The HPV vaccine is not recommended for use in pregnant women. If a woman discovers she is pregnant after starting the vaccine schedule, she should wait until the end of pregnancy before completing the doses. The clinical trials conducted so far have shown no evidence of adverse events for woman and foetus. Further studies are however ongoing.

IF I GOT VACCINATED, SHOULD I STILL FOLLOW THE SCREENING PLAN?

Yes, because screening through HPV test or PAP test makes it possible to detect abnormal cell changes in the cervix caused by HPV types that are not contained in the vaccine.



Check your vaccination certificate in your electronic health record

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MORE INFO AT:
fascicolo-sanitario.it

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