

## Human papillomavirus virus (HPV): A guide for parents

Dear Parent,

We have received a few questions from parents on the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine. Since this is a relatively new vaccine, we would like to share some information for you to consider for your child.

Please go through this letter and call us, or write to us, in case there are any further questions or if you require further information. You can call 6130-3535 and ask to speak to me or any of the other physicians, or reach Shivani Dawlatjada at [shivani.dawlatjada@healthspring.in](mailto:shivani.dawlatjada@healthspring.in).

### What is HPV (human papillomavirus)?

HPV is the name for a group of viruses that affect one's skin and the moist membranes lining your body, for example, in one's cervix, anus, mouth, and throat. HPV is a common and highly contagious infection, with over three quarters of sexually active women acquiring it at some time in their lives.

There are more than 100 types of HPV. Around 40 types of HPV infection can affect the genital area. In Indian women, the most common prevalent genotypes are HPV-16 and 18.

Health problems related to HPV include genital warts, cervical cancer and other cancers.

- Genital warts can cause itching, redness or discomfort, and also psychological distress such as anxiety.
- Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer in women aged 15 to 44 years in India. The current estimates indicate approximately 132,000 new cases diagnosed and 74,000 deaths annually in India, accounting to nearly a third of global cervical cancer deaths. Indian women face a 2.5% cumulative lifetime risk and 1.4% cumulative death risk from cervical cancer.
- Other HPV-related cancers might not have signs or symptoms until they are advanced and hard to treat. These include cancers of the vulva, vagina, penis, anus, and oropharynx (cancers of the back of the throat, including the base of the tongue and tonsils.)

### How is HPV spread?

HPV is most commonly spread during vaginal or anal sex. HPV can be passed even when an infected person has no signs or symptoms.

Other cofactors are necessary for progression from cervical HPV infection to cancer. Some of these cofactors are long-term use of hormonal contraceptives, early initiation of sexual

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activity, multiple sex partners, tobacco smoking, co-infection with HIV, and co-infection with Chlamydia trachomatis and herpes simplex virus type-2.

### **What are the signs, symptoms and potential health problems of HPV?**

Most people with HPV do not develop symptoms or health problems from it. In 90% of cases, the body's immune system clears HPV naturally within two years.

However, sometimes, HPV infections are not cleared and can cause:

- Genital warts
- Warts in the throat: These represent a rare condition called recurrent respiratory papillomatosis, or RRP. When this occurs in children it is called juvenile-onset RRP (JORRP.)
- Cervical cancer and other, less common but serious cancers, including cancers of the vulva, vagina, penis, anus, and oropharynx (back of throat including base of tongue and tonsils)

### **How can one prevent HPV and the health problems it can cause?**

1. Get vaccinated: HPV vaccines are safe and effective. They can protect males and females against diseases (including cancers) caused by HPV when given in the recommended age groups. The vaccines are given in three shots over six months; it is important to get all three doses.

Vaccination schedule:

1st Dose: Now

2nd Dose: 1-2 months after Dose 1

3rd Dose: 6 months after Dose 1

2. Get screened for cervical cancer: Routine screening for women aged 21 to 65 years old can prevent cervical cancer.

### **What is the HPV vaccine?**

There are two HPV vaccines available for protection against HPV. HPV vaccines are given as three injections over six months; it is important to get all three doses to get the best protection.

In India, at present, the Indian Academy of Paediatrics recommends immunization of girls after 11 years of age, while abroad, immunization is offered to both girls and boys.

The vaccine is freely available at all Healthspring Centres and other hospitals.

### **Is the HPV vaccine safe?**

HPV vaccines were studied in thousands of people in many countries around the world, including the United States. These studies showed no serious safety concerns and found



that both HPV vaccines were safe. Common, mild adverse events reported during these studies include pain where the shot was given, fever, dizziness, and nausea.

### **How long does the vaccine protect one against HPV?**

Studies suggest that vaccine protection is long-lasting. Current studies (with up to about eight years of follow-up data) indicate that the vaccines are effective, with no evidence of waning protection. This information will be updated as additional data regarding duration of protection becomes available.

### **At what age should my child get the HPV vaccine?**

Routine vaccination with three doses of HPV vaccine is recommended for all 11 and 12 year-old girls. The vaccines can be given as early as 9 years of age.

For the HPV vaccine to work best, it is very important for pre-teens to get all three doses before any sexual activity begins. It is possible to get infected with HPV the very first time one has sexual contact with another person, even if one does not have intercourse. Also, the vaccine produces better immunity to fight infection when given at a young age.

HPV vaccines can also be given to the following:

- Lactating women
- Patients with minor acute illnesses, such as diarrhoea or mild upper respiratory tract infections, with or without fever
- Women who have had an equivocal or abnormal Pap test, a positive HPV test, or genital warts. However, these patients should be advised that data do not indicate that the vaccine will have any therapeutic effect on existing Pap test abnormalities, HPV infection or genital warts.

We hope this gives you a better sense of HPV and the associated vaccine; please do feel free to reach out to us if you have any more questions.

Dr. Khullar  
Paediatrician, Healthspring

