

Health & Fitness Tips

Papillomavirus Vaccination Program - Cancer protection

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If you are a woman aged 26 years or younger, you may be eligible for vaccination against Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and cervical cancer under the National Human Papillomavirus Vaccination Program.

This program runs from July 2007 to June 2009. Eligible women in the full-time ADF can access vaccination through Defence Health Services.

What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus is the name of a group of viruses that cause skin warts, genital warts and some cancers, particularly cervical cancer. HPV is a sexually transmitted infection, with 80 per cent of women having a HPV infection at some time in their life. In the majority of cases the body clears the virus naturally. About 10 per cent of women will get a persistent HPV infection that triggers abnormal changes to the cells in the cervix, which may develop into cervical cancer.



HPV vaccine

Gardasil is a vaccine against four of the HPV strains that together cause about 70 per cent of cervical cancers and 90 per cent of genital warts. The vaccine is preventive and won't cure HPV if already present. It cannot protect against infection by other HPV types not in the vaccine.

Gardasil is given as a series of three injections into the upper arm over a period of six months. It is important to have all three doses. The course should not be started if it cannot be completed by the 27th birthday or by June 2009.

Who will benefit?

The HPV vaccine is most effective in young women who have not yet had sex and have not been exposed to HPV. For those who are already sexually active, the likelihood of being infected by all four strains of the virus is small, so the vaccine still offers protection from those types the individual has not been exposed to.

How safe is it?

Extensive clinical trials showed only minor side effects such as redness, pain and swelling at the injection site, and mild fever. Gardasil is manufactured using a yeast base, so if you have a yeast allergy, let your doctor know. The vaccine is not recommended for pregnant women.

Pap smears still needed

The vaccine does not protect against all HPV types that cause cervical cancer, only the high risk types. All women who have ever been sexually active should have a Pap smear at least every two years.

How to get the vaccine

Vaccination is entirely voluntary. It is not a requirement for service or deployment and will not affect your Medical Employment Classification.

For more information, contact your local ADF health facility or visit <http://www.health.gov.au/cervicalcancer>