



## Things to think about when considering the HPV vaccine

1. There are approximately 13 different HPV viruses that can cause cervical cancer. They are spread through sexual contact.
2. The vaccine (GARDASIL®) protects against four subtypes of HPV: two that cause warts and two that cause cancer on the cervix.
3. We don't know if these HPV subtypes are the most common or dangerous ones in Manitoba. There may be other subtypes of HPV in different parts of Canada than the ones the vaccine covers.
4. There is some concern that preventing infection from only two of many possible cancer-causing viruses leaves room for infection from an even more dangerous virus.
5. It's not clear yet if the vaccine provides life-long protection or if (or when) a booster shot may be needed to maintain protection against these HPV subtypes.
6. Regular pap screening is still important. Some who have been vaccinated may mistakenly think they are immune to cervical changes or diseases and don't need pap tests or pelvic exams. This isn't true. Stopping or reducing screening may mean an early diagnosis of cancer or other sexually transmitted infections (like gonorrhea or chlamydia) is missed.
7. The vaccine is less effective if sexual contact has already happened. It will not stop a cancer from forming if there is already HPV infection.
8. Deaths from cervical cancer are relatively rare. Most at risk are older women, women who don't have regular pap tests, or women who don't get proper follow-up for an abnormal pap test. It is important to be screened and to follow up on an abnormal pap test result.
9. The vaccine may reduce the risk of other types of cancer caused by the HPV virus (like cancer of the penis, bowel cancer) but the benefits are not yet clear.
10. Newer vaccines that cover more HPV subtypes are being tested. They may be available in the next few years.

Deciding to have the HPV vaccine or not is an important decision. Understanding all sides of the issue can help.

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