

# HPV Vaccination

For men who have sex with men (MSM)



## What is human papillomavirus (HPV) and what diseases can it cause?

There are over 100 types of HPV that infect the skin and mucous membranes. The majority of HPV infections do not cause any symptoms and infections usually resolve on their own.

HPV infections which persist can lead to cancers e.g. HPV types 16 and 18 cause the majority of HPV associated cancers, notably anal, throat and penile in men and cervical cancer in women.

Other types of HPV such as 6 and 11 cause genital warts.

## How is HPV infection spread?

HPV is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections in the UK. HPV is spread mainly by skin to skin contact. Genital HPV infections are highly contagious, and usually associated with sexual contact. Nearly all sexually active people get infected with HPV at some point in their lives. The risk increases with the number of sexual partners you and/or your partners have.

## Can HPV infection be prevented?

Condoms do not guarantee protection from infection. This is because HPV can be transmitted by skin contact with areas not covered by condoms.

The best way to protect yourself from HPV infection is to get vaccinated. The vaccine offered to MSM attending sexual health/HIV clinics is called Gardasil. It protects against the four HPV types 6, 11, 16 and 18 that are responsible for causing cancers and genital warts.

The vaccine is a course of 3 injections over 4-12 months if you have the first dose aged 15 years or older. If you have the first dose before 15 years of age, you only need two doses (6 months apart). Ideally, vaccine should be given before you become sexually active but the protection is still good even if you receive the vaccine later. To get the best protection, it is important you receive the full course of vaccination.

## From 15 to 45 years of age:

**1st dose:** Initial dose.

**2nd dose:** at least one month after the first dose.

**3rd dose:** 3 months after the second dose and ideally within 12 months of the first dose.

## Who is being offered HPV vaccine at sexual health / HIV clinics?

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The UK's expert panel on immunisation matters, the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI), has recommended that HPV vaccine should be offered to all MSM up to (and including) 45 years of age when they attend sexual health/HIV clinics for sexual health services.

Other individuals may be offered HPV vaccination based on a clinical assessment of the potential benefit. These include some MSM over 45 years, transgender men and women, HIV positive men who are not MSM, HIV positive women and sex workers.

## Why should MSM attending sexual health/HIV clinics be vaccinated?

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The risk of anal cancer in MSM is higher than in heterosexual men. If you also have HIV, this risk is higher again. In addition, MSM are more likely to get genital warts.

In the UK, a HPV vaccine programme for girls aged 12-13 has been in place since 2008. Vaccinating the majority of girls

in the UK, means that their future male partners get some protection too. However boys who become MSM will get far less of this protection.

HPV vaccination is a very effective way to reduce your risk of genital warts and your risk of developing HPV-associated cancer in the future.

## Is the vaccine safe?

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Gardasil is a very safe vaccine. The vaccine meets the rigorous safety standards required for it to be used in the UK and other European countries. It has been used in the UK since autumn 2012. It has been given safely to millions in Europe, the Americas and Australasia. HPV vaccine safety is taken seriously by the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), and its safety is kept under continual review.

## Does it have any side effects?

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The most common side effects are similar to other common vaccines and can include tenderness, swelling and redness at the site of the injection and headaches. More serious side effects are rare.

For more information, speak to your clinic nurse or doctor.

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