

What is HPV? What effects can it have?

HPV is short for
'human papillomaviruses'.

To date more than 200 types of HPV have been discovered, of which around 40 can affect the genitalia. These are among the most commonly sexually transmitted viruses in the world. Almost everyone will be infected at least once during their lives. While most people will have no symptoms during an infection, the effects in others can vary widely – from harmless warts through to long-term effects such as cervical cancer in women and penis cancer in men.



If you have any questions, your gynaecologist or specialist in paediatric and youth medicine will be able to advise you in confidence.

The specialist doctors and the team of medical experts from AOK-Clarimedis can also provide information about the HPV vaccine. This service is free of charge to AOK policyholders and is accessible around the clock on 0800 1 265 265.

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The HPV vaccine

Essential protection for young people.

AOK Rheinland/Hamburg
Die Gesundheitskasse.

How can I avoid getting the diseases?

An acute infection can last up to two years but is often not identified due to the lack of symptoms.

During this time the viruses can be passed on undetected to sexual partners – including through close skin contact without sex, meaning that condoms are not reliable protection against HPV viruses. However, a vaccine is available that protects against the HPV viruses that most frequently cause cancer in later life.

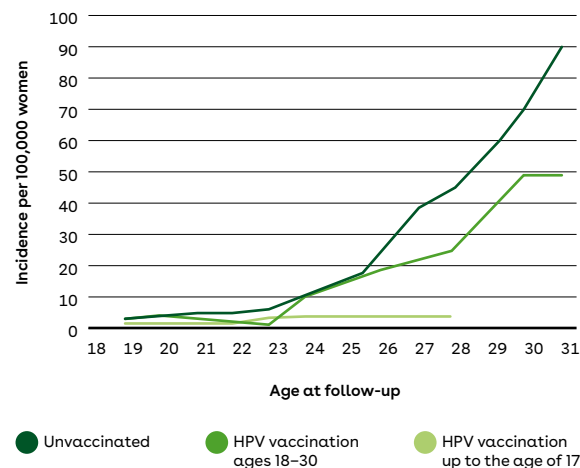
Who is the vaccine intended for?

The Standing Committee on Vaccination (STIKO) at the Robert Koch Institute recommends that the HPV vaccine is given to people aged from 9 to 14, and in some cases up to the age of 17 – ideally before the person first engages in intimate contact. This applies to boys and girls equally because the vaccine protects both women and men from potentially cancer-causing HPV viruses. The STIKO points out that HPV infections cause between 1,600 and 2,300 cases of cancer in men. Additionally, a high vaccination rate of both sexes can achieve community protection.

How tried and tested is the vaccine?

Cervical cancer has been known about for a long time: the topic has been intensely researched since 1813. The primary causes – HPV types 16 and 18 – were discovered in 1982. The first clinical trials of the vaccine started in the 1990s, and the first vaccine was launched on the German market in 2006. The STIKO has recommended the vaccine for girls since 2007 and for boys since 2018. Similarly, top international organisations such as the EU Commission, the European Cancer Organisation (ECCO) and the World Health Organization (WHO) advocate widespread distribution of the vaccine. The objective is to prevent cancers caused by HPV around the world. To date more than 500 million doses have been administered globally.

Cervical cancer without and with HPV vaccine



Source: N Engl J Med 2020;383:1340-8. DOI: 10.1056/NEJMoa1917338 ©BVF 2020

What are the benefits and drawbacks of the vaccine?



- We know from studies that the vaccine significantly reduces the risk of certain types of cancer in boys and girls.
- For example, a Swedish study has shown that the risk of cervical cancer in women who received the HPV vaccine before the age of 17 was 88% lower than in unvaccinated women.
- The vaccine also helps prevent genital warts.
- The safety profile of the HPV vaccines is continually monitored by national and international health organisations.
- The HPV vaccines that are currently on the market are generally classed as well tolerated.



- Side effects such as redness at the injection site occur in a few cases.
- No connection to the vaccine has been identified for the small number of suspected cases of severe side effects globally.