HPV is short for human papillomavirus. Approximately 8 out of 10 women who are sexually active will get an HPV infection at some time in their lives. Usually, your body fights off the virus within 2 years. Sometimes, though, the virus remains present. This can lead to cell changes in the cervix, an early stage of cancer, that may progress to cervical cancer later. The HPV vaccine protects against 2 dangerous types of HPV (types 16 and 18). These 2 types cause 70% of all cervical cancer. Vaccination does not guarantee that you will never get cervical cancer, but it gives you more protection.

Cervical cancer
Cervical cancer is a serious disease. In the Netherlands, each year about 700 women get cervical cancer and each year about 200 women die from it.

How do you get an HPV infection?
HPV is passed on during sex. The virus gets into the mucous membranes of the sex organs. It can also pass from person to person if they have skin contact in the genital area. Using a condom does not provide complete protection against HPV, but safe sex is always important for preventing other diseases.

Vaccination
You can protect yourself against the most frequent types of HPV by getting an HPV vaccination. The HPV vaccine is designed to be given in 2 doses, the second dose about 6 months after the first. The vaccine is injected in the upper arm.

Where and when?
HPV vaccination is part of the Dutch National Immunisation Programme. The vaccination is free, and you get it through your municipal health service or a local Youth and Families Centre. You will receive an invitation by post a few weeks before your vaccination is due. You do not have to be vaccinated if you don’t want to.
Side effects
The side effects of the HPV vaccination are similar to those of other vaccinations. They are not serious. You might get muscle pain in the injected arm, this could last a week. Some girls get a short spell of tummy pain, nausea, fatigue, headache or fever. If that happens within 24 hours of the vaccination, it may be caused by the vaccination. Few girls faint after the vaccination. This is usually due to nerves.

Smear tests are still necessary
HPV vaccination does not guarantee that you will not ever get cervical cancer, so you need to be checked for the disease when you are older. From the age of 30 you will get an invitation for a smear test every few years to check for cervical cancer. It is important to have the tests. See also www.rivm.nl/uitstrijkje (information also available in English).

The advantage and disadvantage
The HPV vaccine gives long-term protection against 2 types of HPV that cause 70% of all cervical cancer. You need to have 2 injections in your upper arm. The second injection is given about 6 months after the first. Most girls get some muscle pain in their upper arm after the injection.

Janine, youth health doctor (MHS)
“Giving this vaccination saves some women from getting cervical cancer. Smear testing is still important as well, in order to pick up cancers at an early stage. But it’s good to prevent the disease where possible.”

Gemma Kenter, gynaecologist
“I advise all girls to have the vaccination early. The best age is about 12, when most of them are not yet sexually active and therefore not infected by HPV. People sometimes think that there are risks, but take it from me: HPV vaccination is just as safe as any other vaccination.”

Ellenie
“I don’t want cervical cancer when I’m older, so I’ve had the vaccination. My parents thought it was a good idea, and I took their advice. I read on the internet that the vaccinations aren’t good for you. But, if those rumours were true, why would we have a vaccination programme?”

Rosanne, mother
“You sometimes see contradictory things in the news about HPV vaccination. So I’m going to call my GP and find out more about it before I have my daughter vaccinated.”

Roel, father
“National vaccination was brought in because too many women were getting cervical cancer. It has to be a good thing to prevent the disease. We felt it was in our daughter’s best interests. No one wants their children to get cancer, after all.”

Facts
• Approximately 8 out of 10 women who are sexually active will get an HPV infection at some time in their lives.
• HPV infections sometimes lead to cervical cancer.
• Every year, about 8,000 women in the Netherlands go to a gynaecologist for cervical cancer tests.
• Every year, about 700 women in the Netherlands get cervical cancer. About 200 women die from the disease.
• Beside the invitation for vaccination, you are invited for a smear test from the age of about 30.
Questions and answers

Can the vaccination cause infertility?
No. Your immune system responds to the vaccination by making antibodies. The vaccination has no effect at all on your hormones or your reproductive organs, so it cannot cause infertility.

Do I need my parents’ consent?
When you are 12 years old, you are actually entitled to decide for yourself whether you have the vaccination. Nevertheless, it is better to talk it over at home and make a decision together. It isn’t necessary that your parents are with you when you have the injections, but you should take your HPV vaccination document and appointment card.

Why are girls vaccinated so young?
The vaccine works best if it is given before you come into contact with the virus. As the virus is passed on during sex, the vaccine should be given before you become sexually active. At 12, very few girls are sexually active, so that is a good age for vaccination. Another reason is that HPV is more likely to be caught at a young age.

What should I do if I don’t want the vaccination?
You do not have to do anything. Just throw away the invitation. You will get a reminder, but you can ignore that too.

Is there any proof that HPV vaccination helps against cervical cancer?
Yes. Research has shown that the vaccination prevents changes in the cervix that may progress to cervical cancer later. More information in Dutch is available on this website: www.rivm.nl/hpv.

What if I have side effects of the vaccination?
All side effects are investigated by Lareb (a scientific laboratory that specialises in this field). If you have any side effect, you can report it using the form on www.lareb.nl. The form is in Dutch.

What happens if I get an HPV infection?
Usually, your body fights off the virus within 2 years. If you are vaccinated against HPV, the way your body responds to infection is different:

If you are not vaccinated: at risk of getting cervical cancer later in life

1. Before infection, the cells in your cervix are healthy.
2. If you are infected with HPV, the cells in your cervix are infected by the virus.
3. Usually, your body fights off the virus. If not, the virus could lead to cell changes in your cervix.
4. It usually takes 10 to 15 years for an HPV infection to lead to cervical cancer.

If you are vaccinated: protected against cervical cancer caused by 2 important types of HPV

1. Before infection, the cells in your cervix are healthy.
2. Vaccination gets your body to make antibodies.
3. If you are infected by HPV type 16 or type 18, the antibodies attach themselves to the virus. The virus is recognized by your body and will be destroyed.
4. The antibodies stay in your body, giving you long-term protection. The cells in your cervix remain healthy.
Information leaflet
There is an information leaflet about every vaccine. You can find the Dutch information leaflet about the HPV vaccine at www.rijkswacnatieprogramma.nl/bijsluiters. Read the leaflet if you want to find out more about the vaccine in advance. You can also get a printed leaflet from the doctor or nurse who gives the vaccination.

National Immunisation Programme
HPV vaccination has been part of the National Immunisation Programme since 2009. This immunisation programme protects all children in the Netherlands against 12 serious diseases. The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment informs you in good time about all vaccinations. The National Institute for Public Health and the Environment keeps records of vaccination data according to the Data Protection Act and only uses the data for the National Immunisation Programme.

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