Free HPV vaccine for all women born in 1991 or later. It's happening now!

Young women can now benefit from free human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination to protect themselves against cervical cancer. HPV is very common and is transmitted through sexual contact. The vaccine is recommended for all young women, whether they have had no, one or more sexual partners.

70% of all sexually active people are infected with HPV, most at a young age. A recent Norwegian study has shown that approximately 45% of 21-year-old women had an ongoing HPV infection. Most HPV infections have no symptoms and will eventually disappear but around 10% will develop into a chronic infection which could cause cervical cancer. There are many strains of HPV. The HPV vaccine provides protection against two of the most common carcinogenic strains. Vaccination is recommended for all young women, regardless of sexual history. Three doses of the vaccine are given over a period of six to twelve months. Since the offer of free vaccination is valid for two years from November 2016, vaccination should be started at the latest by the end of 2018.

HPV – the cause of cervical cancer

Cervical cancer is caused by chronic HPV infection. It can take a number of years to develop cervical cancer, but almost 50% of those with the disease are under 45.

Every year in Norway:

- 3,000 women require surgery to remove precancerous cells in the cervix. Many of these are relatively young.
- 300 women develop cervical cancer. Many survivors of cervical cancer have chronic health problems due to the cancer treatment.
- 70 women die from the disease

When precancerous cells are found in the cervix, a part of the cervix has to be removed in order to prevent development into cancer. Women who fall pregnant after this type of surgery have an increased risk of miscarriage and premature birth.
More about the HPV virus

There are many different strains of the HPV virus that. Some are harmless, while others can cause cancer.

Some strains of HPV can cause common warts and genital warts, while others can cause cancer in various organs. Cervical cancer is the most common type of cancer among women, but HPV can also cause cancer of the vagina, external sexual organs, rectum or throat. Men can develop cancer after an HPV infection in the penis, rectum and throat. Condoms offer limited protection against HPV because the virus is also found in the skin surrounding the sexual organs.

About the HPV vaccine

- The HPV vaccine used is called Cervarix.
- The pharmaceutical authorities have approved the vaccine following a comprehensive evaluation of its efficacy and side effects.
- The vaccine protects against HPV 16 and 18, the two strains that cause 70% of all cervical cancer cases.
- The vaccine can also provide partial protection against other HPV strains (cross-protection).
- The effect of the vaccine is thought to be long-term, perhaps lifelong.

The first women to receive the vaccine (nine years ago) have been closely monitored and there are no indications of any reduction in the protection afforded by the vaccine to date.
- The vaccine can be given to women who have a HPV infection but will not cure an ongoing infection.
- Testing for HPV infection before taking the vaccine is not recommended.
- The vaccine does not protect against genital warts.

Getting the HPV vaccine

- Check the website for the municipality where you live to find out where and when you can receive the vaccine.
- You do not have to be registered in your local municipality to receive the vaccine.
- The offer of free vaccination applies to all young women born in 1991 or later, and is valid for two years.
- Vaccination should start at the latest by the end of 2018.

Registration

All the doses you receive are registered in the Norwegian Immunisation Registry SYSVAK. You can check which vaccines you have received online through Mine vaksiner (My Vaccines):
www.helsenorge.no

IMPORTANT!

- The vaccine is injected into the upper arm. Three doses are required.
- The second dose is administered at least one month after the first. The last dose is administered at least five months after the second.
- Pregnant women cannot receive the HPV vaccine.
Side effects

The most common side effects of the HPV vaccine offered are temporary and include:

- Tenderness, redness and swelling in the upper arm around the injection site. These are very common (more than one in ten).
- Headache, tiredness or muscle pain. These are very common (more than one in ten).
- A high temperature is common (one to ten of 100). Other common side effects are joint pains, itching, skin rash, nausea, vomiting/diarrhoea or stomach pains.
- Some persons also feel dizzy or faint. This is usually due to discomfort or anxiety about the injection. Please tell the person who is administering the vaccine if you have fainted before in similar situations. Severe allergic reactions may occur, but are rare. It is therefore necessary to wait for 20 minutes after vaccination before leaving the clinic. Healthcare personnel who give vaccines are prepared to deal with this type of reaction. There is no documentation, either in Norway or abroad, of other serious illnesses caused by the HPV vaccine. It has been suggested that HPV vaccination may be linked to a combination of symptoms, including rapid pulse, dizziness and tiredness which have been registered in Denmark. These symptoms have also been registered among people who have not received the vaccine. The pharmaceutical authorities have performed detailed studies of these symptoms and have found no evidence that they are caused by the vaccine.

Symptoms experienced after vaccination are not necessarily a reaction to the vaccine, but may be signs of a disease requiring medical attention. For this reason, you should contact your doctor if you have concerns.

Anyone who experiences severe or unexpected symptoms after vaccination should also contact health care personnel so that these can be reported to the pharmaceutical authorities. Suspected side effects can be reported directly to the Norwegian Medicines Agency website by private individuals, but follow-up of such reports is more effective when communicated via health personnel.

For more information about side effects and reporting procedures, go to: www.slv.no and www.fhi.no.

Women who have received the HPV vaccine should follow a regular cervical cancer screening programme

The cervical cancer screening programme (samples of cells taken from the cervix) is an offer to all Norwegian women aged 25 and older for cervical cancer screening every three years. The purpose of the programme is to detect cancer or precancerous cells as early as possible. It is important to continue with the cervical cancer screening programme even if you have been vaccinated, as the HPV vaccine does not provide protection against all carcinogenic types of HPV. Those who take the vaccination and take part in the cervical cancer screening programme have the highest level of protection against cervical cancer.
You can find information on where and when you can receive HPV vaccination on the website for the municipality where you live.

HPV vaccination comprises three doses. The second dose is administered at least one month after the first. The final dose is administered at least five months after the second dose.

The vaccine is recommended for all young women, whether they have had no, one or more sexual partners.

Pregnant women cannot take the vaccine.

The HPV vaccine provides no protection against other sexually transmitted diseases so a condom is important for those who have been vaccinated.

The best protection against cervical cancer is to take the HPV vaccine and participate in the cervical cancer screening programme.

More information is available on the Norwegian Institute of Public Health's website www.fhi.no/hpv