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VACCINE AGAINST HPV

(Human Papilloma Virus)

Genital HPV infection is a sexually transmitted disease caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV). There are over 100 types of human papilloma virus. More than half of all sexually active men and women will have contact with HPV at some time in their lives. However, most HPV types that infect people tend not to cause noticeable symptoms.

In most cases the virus goes away by itself. There is a number of so-called «high-risk» HPVs, which can lead to the development of cancer of the cervix, vulva, vagina, anus or penis. HPV may also cause genital warts.

The first prophylactic vaccine to prevent cervical cancer, as well as other diseases caused by certain HPV types, has been launched recently. The vaccine protects against HPV types 6, 11, 16 and 18, which cause 70% of cervical cancers and 90% of genital warts. The current vaccine is only available for women and no relevant side effects have been reported.

It is recommended that girls be vaccinated at age 11 or 12, before sexual activity begins. However, the vaccine may also be given to sexually active women.

Although the vaccine has not been proven to be effective against existing HPV symptoms, it can be given to women with symptoms such as genital warts or abnormal smear test results.

The duration of the protection is not clear. Current studies show that it would be effective for at least 5 years.

The vaccine is administered in three separate visits within a period of six months. It is not recommended for pregnant women; however, the vaccine may be administered to women while breastfeeding.

Vaccinated women should continue to have gynaecological examinations and pap tests once a year, since the vaccine is not effective against all HPV types.

