



# Vaccines to protect your child

## HPV, MenACWY and Tdap

Information for parents of children starting secondary school in 2020



There are three vaccines offered to protect your child from infectious diseases:

- **HPV vaccine** which protects against the HPV virus which can cause cancer and genital warts
- **Meningococcal ACWY vaccine** which protects against four types of meningitis (inflammation of the lining around the brain) and/or septicaemia (blood poisoning) caused by meningococcal disease
- **Tdap vaccine** which protects against:
  - tetanus (tetanus toxin can cause painful muscle spasms and convulsions)
  - diphtheria (bacteria that can cause a sore throat and severe breathing difficulties) and
  - pertussis (also known as whooping cough)

**HPV:**  
Protects  
against  
cancer

**MenACWY:**  
Protects  
against  
meningitis

**Tdap:**  
Protects  
against  
harmful  
bacteria

The next section gives information about each of these vaccines and the viruses and bacteria they protect against.





## HPV Vaccines

### What is HPV?

HPV stands for 'human papillomavirus', which is a group of more than 100 viruses. HPV causes 99% of cervical cancer. The HPV virus is very common, and you can catch it by being sexually active with another person who already has the virus. Most HPV infections do not need treatment. However, in some people, HPV infection can persist and cause cancer. HPV also causes genital warts.

People may associate HPV with girls more than boys because one of the main cancers the virus can cause is cervical cancer – that is, cancer of the neck of the womb. The HPV vaccine has been offered to girls in first year since 2010.

It is important, though, that boys get the vaccine too, as research shows that the HPV virus can cause other cancers and conditions that can affect boys as well as girls. The more young people vaccinated – both **boys and girls** – the better we can control the spread of the infection. So, the HPV vaccine has been offered to boys and girls since September 2019.

115 countries now have an HPV vaccine programme, with more than 22 of these countries giving the vaccine to **boys and girls**. These countries include the UK, US, Australia and New Zealand.

### As well as cervical cancer, what other cancers can HPV cause?

Research has shown HPV infection can be associated with cancers of the throat (oropharynx), the back passage (the rectum) and the penis. Also, the HPV virus causes a range of pre-cancerous lesions – abnormal cells – in both men and women.

The HPV virus causes:

- 99% of cervical cancers
- 9 out of 10 HPV-related anal cancers
- 7 out of 10 vaginal cancers
- 5 out of 10 vulval cancers

HPV vaccine is given in more than 115 countries to prevent cancers

HPV causes 1 in 20 cancers worldwide

## How many doses of the HPV vaccine will my child need?

Two doses of the vaccine are needed to give full protection.

Studies have shown that anyone starting the vaccine programme at 15 years or older needs three doses for full protection.

Over 300,000 students in Ireland and 100 million people worldwide have received HPV vaccine



### MenACWY Vaccine

## What is meningococcal disease?

Meningococcal disease is a serious illness which can cause meningitis (inflammation of the lining around the brain) and septicaemia (blood poisoning) and can lead to death.

The onset of meningococcal disease can be very sudden.

The symptoms include fever, stiff neck, headache, joint pains, and a rash.

Meningococcal disease can occur at any age, but the highest rate of disease occurs in children under 5 years of age, especially children under 1 year old. The next high-risk group are young people aged 15-19 years.

## Why should my child get the MenACWY meningococcal vaccine now?

All children were offered a meningococcal group C vaccine when they were babies. However, immunity to meningococcal disease reduces over time, so a **booster dose** is recommended now to provide additional protection. The Meningococcal ACWY vaccine will boost your child's protection against group C meningococcal disease, and will provide additional protection against meningococcal groups A, W and Y.



## Tdap Vaccine

### What is Tdap?

Tdap stands for tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis (whooping cough).

**Tetanus** can cause generalised painful muscle spasms leading to difficulty breathing and death.

**Diphtheria** is a serious disease that usually begins with a sore throat and can quickly develop to cause breathing problems. It can also damage the heart and nervous system.

**Whooping cough (pertussis)** is a disease that can cause long periods of coughing and choking that can make it hard to breathe.

All of these infections are serious diseases that could lead to a hospital admission for your child. At worst, these conditions can cause death.

5 doses  
will  
complete  
your course

### How many doses of Tdap vaccine does my child need?

**All children** were offered vaccines against tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough when they were babies, and again in Junior Infants. Immunity to diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough reduces over time, so a **booster dose** is recommended now to provide additional protection.

Up to now, your child should have received four doses of a tetanus, diphtheria and whooping cough vaccine – that is:

- 3 doses as a baby
- a booster dose when they were in Junior Infants

This is their fifth and final dose and will give them long lasting protection.

### General questions you might have...

#### Are vaccines safe?

Yes. All vaccines are safe and have been proven to save lives and prevent serious illness. Vaccines are strictly monitored and reviewed regularly by international bodies including:

- the World Health Organization
- the European Medicines Agency
- the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the USA

All international bodies have continually reported that the vaccines used in Ireland are safe with no known long-term side effects.

## Do the vaccines have side effects?

Most students have no problems after vaccines.

It is common, though, for some students to have an area of soreness, swelling and redness of their arm where the injection was given. This is nothing to worry about and usually passes after a day or two.

Some students may get a headache, feel sick in their tummy or run a slight temperature. If this happens, you can give them paracetamol or ibuprofen.

Occasionally, some students may feel unwell and faint after getting their injection. To prevent this, the team will advise students to sit down and rest for 15 minutes after their vaccinations.

Severe allergic reactions to vaccines **are** very rare, and the school vaccination teams are trained to treat any severe allergic reaction.

## Where can I find additional information?

Visit [www.hpv.ie](http://www.hpv.ie) and [www.immunisation.ie](http://www.immunisation.ie) for a wide range of information, including videos and factsheets about the vaccines.

You can also find links to the patient information leaflets for the vaccines used in the programme at [www.immunisation.ie](http://www.immunisation.ie)

If you have any further questions, please talk to a member of your HSE school immunisation team. Details are available at the HSE Local Immunisation webpage: <http://bit.ly/SchoolLHO>

## What happens next?

When your child starts secondary school, they will get a detailed information pack and a consent form. You need to **sign the consent form** and return it to the school to ensure your child receives the vaccines in school.

The HSE school vaccination programme may need to be delivered in a different venue or take longer to deliver because of Covid-19. We will do our best to keep changes to a minimum.

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