

What You Should Know About ...

Depo-provera

See Glossary section for definitions of underlined words.

What is depo-provera?

- Depo-provera is a hormone given by injection (a needle).
- Each injection protects against pregnancy for three months.
- The injection is usually given in the buttocks, thigh or upper arm by a health care provider.

How does it work?

- Depo-provera is a hormone (progestin). This hormone stops your ovaries from releasing an ovum (egg) each month. If there is no egg, you cannot get pregnant.
- It makes the cervical mucous thicker. This makes it harder for sperm to get into the uterus.
- It also changes the lining of the uterus so it is harder for a fertilized egg to stick to the uterus. Even if an egg is released and fertilized, it will not continue to grow.
- Depo-provera will prevent pregnancy more than 99% of the time.
- Each injection gives you protection against pregnancy for 12 weeks.

How soon does it start working?

- When you have the depo-provera injection within the first five days of your menstrual cycle, it works 24 hours after the injection.
- When you have the depo-provera injection **after** the first five days of your menstrual cycle, it works after 14 days
- When the depo-provera injection is given to a woman after she has given birth, or had a miscarriage or an abortion, it works immediately.

Where can I get depo-provera?

- You can get depo-provera from your health care provider.
- Talk to your health care provider if cost is a problem for you.

Before I start to use depo-provera, what will the health care provider need to know?

The health care provider needs to know if:

- You are pregnant or think you are pregnant
- You have a liver disease, heart problems, seizures, diabetes or asthma
- You have migraine headaches or depression
- You are using any medication including contraceptives
- You have any allergies
- You have experienced heavy vaginal bleeding
- You have lumps, swelling or tenderness in your breasts
- You have any medical conditions or illness
- You have had a Pap test, and if so, when was your last Pap test.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding any of these health conditions, you should talk to a health care provider.

Does it protect me from STIs and HIV?

- **NO.** Always use a latex or polyurethane male condom or a female condom when you have sex to reduce the risk of getting an STI (sexually transmitted infection) or HIV infection.

How often do I have the injection?

- You have the injection once every 10-12 weeks (four times a year).

- You must remember to have the injection on schedule.
- Depo-Provera does not protect against pregnancy when you are late for your injection.

What if I forget or can't come on time to get my three-month injection?

- You must get your injection within 10-12 weeks of the last one. If you wait longer than 13 weeks, you should have a pregnancy test done before your next injection.
- You should also use another form of birth control for 2 weeks after a late injection.

Are there side effects?

- There is slightly greater risk of osteoporosis from taking depo-provera.
- Some women using this method have bleeding between periods, heavy periods or no periods at all.
- Other common side effects include breast tenderness, increased appetite, mood changes, headache or dizziness, and a decrease in sex drive.
- You cannot stop the effects of depo-provera immediately. The side effects are likely to last until the drug has totally worn off.
- It takes an average of 6-10 months for your fertility to return after you have stopped using the drug.

Studies have shown that women who have used depo-provera for a long time have a slight decrease in the calcium in their bones. This can contribute to the development of a condition called osteoporosis. Exercise, enough calcium (1000mg/day), and not smoking can prevent osteoporosis for all women.

Where can I get more information?

- From your health care provider, community health clinic, or public health nurse.
- From the Facts of Life On-Line: e-mail your questions to thefactsoflife@serc.mb.ca.
- From the following website: www.sexualityandu.ca.

Important: If you did not take the depo-provera on time and did not use another form of birth control method during sex, see a health care provider or pharmacist for emergency contraception.

Glossary:

Cervical mucous – The fluid produced by the cervix (the lower part of the uterus that opens into the vagina). The mucous changes at different times of the menstrual cycle. Around the time of ovulation, the mucous is clear and slippery.

Emergency Contraception – Medication used to avoid pregnancy after sex when you didn't use birth control or the birth control didn't work (for example, the condom broke).

Menstrual Cycle – The length of time between the 1st day of a woman's menstruation (period) in one month and the 1st day of her menstruation the next month (measured in days).

Osteoporosis and Depo-provera – The increased risk of thinning bones (osteoporosis) for women who have used depo-provera (hormonal injection). Adequate intake of calcium and vitamin D, weight-bearing activity, and avoiding cigarette smoking may help to prevent osteoporosis. Individuals at increased risk include:

- women who don't have their recommended daily amount of calcium
- very athletic women who do not have a period
- women who have been pregnant numerous times
- women with certain medical conditions.

Depo-provera is one of the very effective forms of birth control. Do not stop this form of birth control without talking to your health care provider. Be informed about your choice. Be educated and choose birth control that is right for you.

Pap Test – A test in which a sample of cells from the cervix are removed to check for any changes in the cervix. Treating early changes may prevent cancer of the cervix.

Uterus – A pear-shaped, hollow organ with muscular walls. The fetus grows in the uterus during pregnancy. The uterus is also called the "womb".