



Center for  
Young Women's Health  
Children's Hospital  
Boston

### Depo-Provera® Hormonal Injections

Female hormonal methods prevent pregnancy by providing small amounts of hormones that stop your ovaries from releasing eggs. Without eggs, pregnancy can't happen. The hormones also change the lining of your uterus and the mucus in your cervix. By changing your cervical mucus, the hormones make it more difficult for sperm to reach the egg.

#### Out of 100 Women Using this Method

Typical Use: Less than 1 Woman

Becomes Pregnant



Perfect Use: Less than 1 Woman

Become Pregnant



#### What are Depo-Provera® hormonal injections?

**Depo-Provera®** contains a synthetic (man-made) form of the hormone progesterone (which your body makes). The Depo-Provera® injection gives 3 months protection against pregnancy. You should get one injection every 3 months (13 weeks) to get the best protection against pregnancy. It is safe to get your injection up to 2 weeks early if your 3-month appointment date does not fit into your schedule.

#### When do Depo-Provera® hormonal injections start to work?

You should get your first Depo-Provera® injection during the first five days of a normal menstrual period. You are then protected from pregnancy right after you get the injection.

#### How does Depo-Provera® prevent pregnancy?

The injected synthetic (man-made) progesterone suppresses your pituitary gland which stops your ovaries from releasing eggs. Without these eggs, pregnancy can't happen. The injections also change the lining of your uterus and the mucus in your cervix.

#### How effective are Depo-Provera® injections?

If women get Depo-Provera® injections at the right time every 3 months, they are 99% effective. This means that if 100 women get Depo-Provera® injections at the right time, 1 woman will become pregnant in a year. Depo-Provera® injections do **not** protect against sexually transmitted diseases. So you need to use a condom to protect against STDs.

#### Are there other benefits of Depo-Provera® injections besides the prevention of pregnancy?

Yes. Depo-Provera® injections can cause a decrease in menstrual cramps, lighter menstrual periods (or no periods, which many young women think is a good thing), and less chance of anemia.

#### Where can I get Depo-Provera® injections?

Your health care provider can give you Depo-Provera® injections. He/she will first want to do a physical exam and ask you about your medical history and your family's medical history. This way, your health care provider can find out if Depo-Provera® injections

are a good type of contraception for you. The first Depo-Provera® injection is usually given during the first 5 days after a normal menstrual period begins. Each injection costs between \$30-\$75.

### **Are there side effects from Depo-Provera® injections?**

There are **possible** side effects from Depo-Provera® injections. They can be different for each woman. They include:

- Irregular menstrual periods- longer or shorter menstrual periods, heavier or lighter periods
- Loss of menstrual periods (the longer you get Depo-Provera® injections, the greater chance you will begin having no menstrual periods at all)
- Weight gain (estimated that women gain about 5 pounds each year for the first 3 years). But you can help maintain your weight by eating a healthy diet and getting regular exercise.
- Headaches
- Depression
- Possible bone mineral loss

If you get any of these side effects, talk to your health care provider. It is important for you to know that most women will have irregular periods, especially during the first 6 months.

### **Should I be worried about my bones while I am on Depo-Provera®?**

Researchers are currently studying whether teens might be more likely to get lower bone density while taking Depo-Provera®. Your teen years, especially the years you are going through puberty (11 to 15 years), are particularly important for you to **gain** bone density. So until we know more, the best advice is to use Depo-Provera® at least two years after you start your menstrual periods, take in 1300 mg of **calcium** in your diet, take a multivitamin, get lots of weight-bearing exercise, and maintain a healthy weight (don't be too thin).

### **Should I be worried if I stop getting my menstrual period while I am on Depo-Provera®?**

No. Many women stop having their menstrual periods after about 6-12 months of getting Depo-Provera® injections. This is no reason to worry. It's not a medical problem. It just means that your ovaries are resting and not releasing an egg each month. When your ovaries don't release an egg, the lining in your uterus does not grow. So there is no menstrual bleeding. Anyhow, you will get your menstrual period back within 6-18 months after you stop taking the Depo-Provera® injections. Talk to your health care provider if you have more questions.

### **Can any woman get Depo-Provera® injections?**

No. Depo-Provera® injections cannot be used by women who:

- Are pregnant
- Have unexplained vaginal bleeding
- Have a serious liver disease
- Have breast cancer

But the good news is that women who can't use estrogen can still use Depo-Provera®. Depo-Provera® may also benefit patients with sickle cell disease by decreasing sickle cell attacks. Depo-Provera® may also lessen the number of seizures.

### **What if I want to get pregnant? Should I use Depo-Provera®?**

If you want to get pregnant in the next year, you should not use Depo-Provera®, since it can prevent pregnancy for 6-10 months after the last injection. However, if timing is not an issue and you don't want to get pregnant for a couple of years, then you can use Depo-Provera® (if it's right for you) until up to 6-10 months before you want to get pregnant.

### **If I decide to stop getting Depo-Provera® injections, how long before I need to start using another type of contraception?**

If you want to stop getting Depo-Provera® injections, all you need to do is just stop. Even though, the progesterone in the Depo-Provera® injection actually protects against pregnancy for more than 3 months, it is **very important to play it safe and start using another type of contraception 3 months after your last injection.**

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