



# Great Lakes VA HEALTHVIEWS

The Newsletter about Health for Veterans in VISN 12



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## Staying Safe with your Medicine



If you take an active role in your health care, you can help the pharmacy prevent problems with your medicine.

### 1. Know the names of your medicines and why you are taking them

- Be familiar with both the brand name and the generic name of your medicine.
- When a new medicine is prescribed for you, talk to the pharmacist about how to take it, possible side effects, and special storage instructions.

### 2. Communicate

- Tell your doctor or pharmacist about all the medicines you take. This includes all over-the-counter (OTC) medicines, vitamins, and herbals.
- Ask your doctor or pharmacist about whether it is safe to drink alcohol with a prescription or over-the-counter (OTC) medicine.

*(continued on page 2)*

### 3. Check your medicine

- Always check your medicine's color, shape, and size. If it looks different, check with your doctor or pharmacist before taking it.
- Before you take any medicine, be sure it is your name on the container.

### 4. Use your medicine correctly

- Be sure you know the proper way to use your medicine before you take it. This is important with inhalers or different breathing medicines.
- Follow the schedule and take the exact dose prescribed.
- Read ALL the instructions for your prescription. Especially with refills, it is possible the directions or the strength of the medicine has changed.
- Write your daily medicine schedule on a calendar or chart. Remember to update the schedule each time your medicines change.



- Do not take medicine in the dark or when you are distracted. You might take the wrong medicine or too much. Ask for help.

### 5. Tell your providers and the pharmacy about any drug reactions or allergies you have

- Always know which medicines you should **not** take.
- Never take a medicine that was prescribed for someone else.

### 6. Keep good records

- Keep a current list of your medicine in your purse or wallet.
- Make an emergency contact card so important information is easy to find in an emergency.

### 7. Ask questions

- Don't ever be afraid to contact your doctor or pharmacist if you have questions.
- If you think a medicine is making you sick, discuss this with your doctor or pharmacist as soon as possible.
- Never stop taking a medicine on your own – always ask your doctor first.

#### **Remember:**

With so many new medicines, pharmacists are seeing more and more “polypharmacy.” Polypharmacy means that a person is taking more than one medicine for the same reason. Some diseases require treatment with more than one medicine. However, polypharmacy can happen when you go to both a private and VA doctor for the same problem and neither one knows what the other one has prescribed.

## Other Helpful Hints

- If you go to different doctors for different diseases or conditions, it is **EXTREMELY** important to tell all of them about each medicine you are taking.
- When children or grandchildren are around, keep medicine bottles out of reach.
- Use a weekly or daily pillbox to remind you to take the right dose at the right time.
- Keep medicines in their original containers or bottles (except for those in pillboxes).
- Check the expiration date on all medicine and dispose of it properly.

Submitted by:

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## Medication Reconciliation: Because your Safety is Important to Us

“Medication reconciliation” is when your VA providers collect information about all the medicines you are taking. We need to know what medicine has been prescribed by VA providers and by any providers you see in the community.

We also need to know about over-the-counter or herbal medicines you take. We collect this information in order to reduce the chance you will take medicines that interact with each other.

### How can you help?

1. Make a list of all the medicines you take at home (use the form on page 4). Be sure to include any over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbal products, dietary supplements, or sample medicines that you are taking.

2. When you come to the hospital or to a clinic visit, bring this list with you. Your doctor will make any changes that are needed and then you will have a new list of medicines that you should be taking.
3. Give this updated list to all of the other doctors that you see.
4. Get all of your prescription medicines filled at the same pharmacy so the pharmacist can be aware of any problems with your medicines.
5. Ask questions of your doctor, nurse, or pharmacists! We are here to help you and to keep you safe.

Source:  
Committee on Identifying and Preventing Medication Errors  
(2006) Preventing Medication Errors. Washington DC: NAP.

Submitted by:  
Jennifer L. Zacher, PharmD, BCPP



**Fill out this form at home and bring it with you on your next clinic visit**

**Prescription medicine:**

Name

Directions

Provider

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**Over-the-counter medicine:**

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**Herbals or Supplements:**

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**Drug Allergies:**

Drug Name

Type of Reaction

Date

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*Remember...*

**HELP A FELLOW VET**

**Always CALL to  
cancel or  
reschedule**



**if you can't keep  
your appointment!**

 Department of  
Veterans Affairs



**Listening  
to Veterans**

## ASK AN EXPERT

### **Why Did My VA Doctor Deny My Disability Claim?**

As a veteran, you can receive medical care at your local VA Medical Center or Outpatient Clinic. Medical centers and clinics belong to the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) part of the Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA).

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) is the part of DVA that manages benefits and services for veterans. VBA has a network of offices that help you apply for benefits. Most of our VISN 12 veterans use the Chicago or Milwaukee Regional Offices.

One type of benefit is service-connected compensation. This is sometimes called “C&P.” You may be eligible if you have a service-related disability and were not discharged under dishonorable conditions.

When you apply for disability, the Regional Office staff review your case. They will request your service medical records. They will also work with you to get other treatment documents related to your condition(s). You may need to have an exam by a trained disability examiner at a VA Medical Center near you. Not all

claims require exams and you cannot request your own disability exam at a VA Medical Center. Regional Office must refer you.

The VA doctors who perform the disability exam are not the ones who decide if you are service-connected. This can only be done by Regional Office staff, who also decide your degree (or percent) of service connection. That process is called “rating.” You will be notified in writing by the Regional Office of their decision about your claim. The amount of compensation can vary, depending on your degree of disability and the number of your dependents.

If you have questions about applying for a service connected disability, contact the VA Regional Office at 1-800-827-1000. You can also find information online at: [www.vba.va.gov](http://www.vba.va.gov). You may apply online at [vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp](http://vabenefits.vba.va.gov/vonapp).

Answered by:

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# HOME CARE CORNER

## HPV Vaccine: A New Vaccine for Young Women

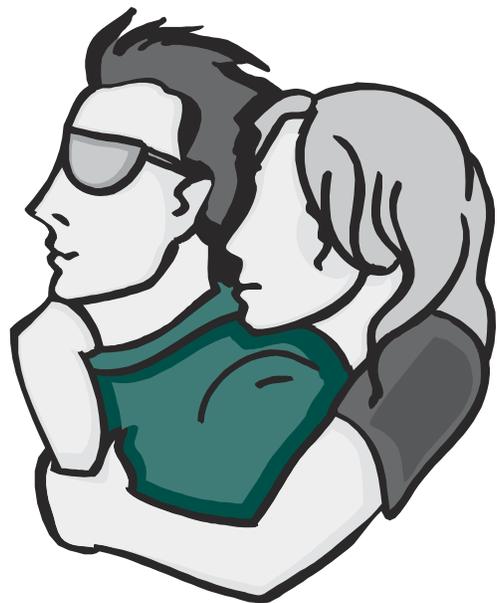
Women in this country are experiencing an epidemic in the 21st century. One in four U.S. women aged 14 through 59 is infected with the human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is spread through sexual contact and is the most common sexually transmitted virus in the United States. About 20 million people in the U.S. are already infected, and about 6.2 million more get infected each year. That means more than 50% of sexually active women and men are infected with HPV at some time in their lives.

Who should be concerned about HPV? Any sexually active woman should be concerned about it. Men should also be concerned about passing it on to their female partner during unprotected sex.

There are about 40 types of HPV. Most HPV infections do not cause symptoms and go away on their own. However, certain types of HPV cause cervical cancer in women. One in 30 women has the type of HPV that is linked to cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths among women around the world.

The HPV Vaccine protects against four major types of HPV. Two of these types cause 70% of the cases of cervical cancer and the other two cause 90% of the cases of genital warts. The HPV vaccine could prevent most cases of cervical cancer.

Young girls should get the vaccine before their first sexual contact. If a female is already sexually active and has been infected with one of the four types of HPV, the vaccine will not protect her from that HPV type.



The CDC currently recommends that girls age 11 and 12 get the new vaccine, and that females between 13 and 26 get “catch-up” vaccines. The CDC guidelines also state that “females as young as 9 years may receive HPV vaccinations.”

At this time, the vaccine is not recommended for women over 26 years of age. Women over 26 should prevent HPV infection by using a condom during sex.

The vaccine is an injection and is given in 3 doses:

- **First dose:** Given at a date that the woman arranges with her health care provider.
- **Second dose:** 2 months after the first dose.
- **Third dose:** 6 months after the first dose.



The three shots are recommended to get the full benefits of the vaccine. As with any vaccine, you will be asked about allergies prior to getting the vaccine. A woman who has had any of the following should NOT get the vaccine:

- A life threatening allergic reaction to yeast.
- Allergy to any other ingredient in the vaccine.
- Allergy to a previous dose of HPV vaccine.

The VA is offering the vaccine to female veterans under the age of 26. It is a simple process:

- Make an appointment with your provider.
- While at your visit, get your annual physical, which would include a Pap test and a mammogram. Then receive your first shot.
- In 2 months, come back for an appointment to get your second shot.
- In 4 months, come back for the 3rd shot.

This vaccine is expected to provide long-lasting protection from HPV. Women who get the vaccine still need to have regular cervical cancer screenings or Pap tests. The vaccine does NOT protect against all HPV types that cause cervical cancer, but it DOES protect against those that most commonly cause cervical cancer.

Sources:

1. American Cancer Society. Cervical Cancer. Available at <http://documents.cancer.org/115.00/115.00.pdf>. Accessed April 28, 2007.
2. E-medicine. Cervical Cancer. Available at <http://www.medicine.com/med/topic324htm>. Accessed May 6, 2007.
3. CDC: Genital HPV Infection-CDC Fact Sheet; Available at <http://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/stdfact-hpv.htm>. Accessed April 28, 2007.
4. Gardasil [Quadrivalent Pappillomavirus (Types 6, 11, 16, 18) Recombinant Vaccine]. Patient information; Whitehouse Station, NJ USA. June, 2006.

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**Important note:** We are not able to **mail** this newsletter to you. It can be found in waiting rooms of your VA Medical Center and outpatient clinics.

You can also subscribe to the electronic version of this newsletter by going to [www.visn12.med.va.gov/subscribe.htm](http://www.visn12.med.va.gov/subscribe.htm)

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*Your best source for information about your health will always be your health care team. We hope this newsletter will encourage you to ask questions about your health concerns.*

**Phone Numbers for VISN 12 Hospitals**

Hines:	708-202-8387
Iron Mountain:	906-774-3300
Madison:	608-256-1901
Milwaukee:	1-888-469-6614
North Chicago:	1-800-393-0865
Tomah:	1-800-872-8662
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**“Ask An Expert” Question  
or Idea for Future Articles**

Do you have an “Ask An Expert” question or an idea for a future article? Your ideas can be e-mailed or mailed to the Senior Editor.

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VISN 12 VA Healthcare facilities are accredited by The Joint Commission. Joint Commission evaluates healthcare facilities on quality, safety of patient care and safety of the environment.

If you have any concerns about patient care or safety in your facility, first contact the person in charge. If your concern cannot be resolved, the VA encourages you to contact Joint Commission. You may request a “public information interview.” Requests can be made to:

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