

Birth Control Injection

What is the birth control injection?

The birth control injection (Depo Provera®) is given to help prevent pregnancy. It contains one hormone called progestin. It doesn't contain estrogen.



The birth control injection prevents pregnancy by:

- stopping your body from releasing an egg. If you don't release an egg, you can't get pregnant.
- decreasing the amount of cervical mucus and making it thicker. This slows the movement of sperm, making it harder for them to get to the uterus.
- making the lining of the uterus thin so implantation can't happen.

How well does the injection work?

- With **typical use** (not following the exact directions) the birth control injection is **94%** effective at preventing pregnancy.
- With **perfect use** (following the exact directions all the time) the injection is **99.8%** effective.
- The injection doesn't protect you from sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or HIV.

How do I use the injection?

You need a prescription from a health care provider. The injection needs to be given by a health care provider every 12 to 13 weeks in the arm or hip. Many sexual health clinics offer some types of birth control for free or at low cost for those who qualify.

There are different ways to start the injection. If you get your first injection:

- during the first 5 days of your period, it takes 24 hours to become effective. You need to use an extra method of birth control (e.g., condoms) or don't have vaginal sex during this time.
- at any other time, it takes 7 days to become effective. You need to use an extra method of birth control (e.g., condoms) or don't have vaginal sex during this time.

What are the benefits of the injection?

- It can be used by people who can't take estrogen.
- It is not affected by most medications.
- It may be easier to remember than other types of birth control because one injection lasts 12 weeks.
- It may lower your risk of ovarian and endometrial cancer.
- It might decrease period cramps.
- It might decrease symptoms of endometriosis, premenstrual syndrome (PMS), and chronic pelvic pain.

How will the injection affect my period?

You can have spotting or bleeding between periods in the first several months of use. This should improve with further injections. If the bleeding is heavy or doesn't stop, talk with your health care provider, as they may be able to recommend ways to help improve your bleeding pattern.

Your period might stop. After one year, 46% of people stop having a period. After 2 years, up to 68% of people stop having a period. This is not harmful to your health.

What are the side effects of the injection?

The injection can cause:

- mild headaches
- breast/chest tenderness
- upset stomach (nausea)
- acne
- less interest in sex
- weight gain
- mood changes

If you are concerned about side effects, talk with your health care provider.

What are the risks of the injection?

When you stop getting the injection, it can take several months for your body to start to release an egg and for your regular bleeding pattern to return. After people stop using the injection, about 50% will be pregnant at 1 year if no birth control is used with vaginal sex, and fertility returns to normal within 2 years. Some people can get pregnant as soon as they stop getting the injection.

The injection can increase your risk of thinning bones (bone mineral loss or osteoporosis). Bone mineral loss is usually temporary and goes away when you stop getting the injection. The risk may increase if you are on the injection for a long time. If you've used the injection for 2 years or more, talk with your healthcare provider about bone mineral loss.

The risk of thinning bones is higher if you:

- have weak or brittle bones
- have a family history of osteoporosis
- have a small body frame
- have certain medical conditions (e.g. inflammatory bowel disease, celiac disease)
- have an eating disorder
- smoke
- exercise very little or not at all
- eat or drink lots of caffeine or alcohol
- take steroids (e.g., prednisone)

How can I prevent bone mineral loss?

You can help keep your bones healthy if you:

- eat foods high in calcium and vitamin D (e.g., milk, yogurt)
- take calcium and vitamin D supplements
- don't smoke or vape nicotine
- limit alcohol and caffeine
- do weight-bearing exercises (e.g., walk, run, or dance) every day

What if I miss or I'm late for my injection?

You can get pregnant as soon as you stop using the injection, even if your periods are not regular.

If your last injection was **13 to 14 weeks** ago, you should still be protected from pregnancy. You need to have your injection **right away** and before 14 weeks have passed.

If your last injection **was over 14 weeks** ago:

- use an extra method of birth control
- see your healthcare provider right away for your next injection
- get emergency contraception as soon as possible if your extra method of birth control fails (e.g., condom breaks) or you've had vaginal sex without a condom.

You can also go to sexandu.ca, click on Contraception, and look for *Stay on Schedule* for more information.

Did You Know

- You have the right to decide to have sex or not. Talk with your partner(s) about consent.
- There is an 85% chance of becoming pregnant within one year if no birth control is used for vaginal sex.
- Use a condom every time you have sex (oral, vaginal, anal). Condoms help prevent pregnancy, STIs and HIV.
- You can lower your risk of HIV by taking an HIV prevention pill every day. Many Albertans can get it for free. Visit www.prepalberta.ca to find out more.
- Transgender and gender diverse people who have a uterus can use hormonal birth control. It can prevent pregnancy and make periods lighter and less painful.

Websites

- ahs.ca/srh
- ReadyorNotAlberta.ca
- TeachingSexualHealth.ca
- myhealth.alberta.ca
- sexandu.ca

For 24/7 nurse advice and general health information, call Health Link at 811.



Scan for more information