

Women's Health

Depo-Provera

Depo-Provera, DMPA or "the shot", is an injectable progestin (hormone), effective for 12 weeks. It works by preventing ovulation (development and ripening of the egg). Other anti-fertility effects such as endometrial atrophy (shrinkage/reduction in size), thickening of the cervical mucus, and decreased mobility of the Fallopian tubes also contribute to its contraceptive effects.

Effectiveness

Depo-Provera is greater than 99% effective in preventing pregnancy. Its effects last for 12 weeks, then another injection must be given. After 13.5 weeks, the shot is no longer considered effective. A woman **MUST** repeat the injection every 12 weeks to maintain protection from pregnancy. The shot usually becomes effective within a few days of injection, but use of an additional contraceptive method as back/up for two weeks after your first dose is highly recommended.

Advantages

- causes no serious complications such as those occasionally associated with estrogen-containing pills, since it contains no estrogen
- provides highly effective, long acting protection against pregnancy
- convenient, does not interfere with intercourse
- lightens menstrual flow
- decreases menstrual cramps in some cases
- reduced risk of PID, endometrial and ovarian cancers
- it's easy to use and private

Disadvantages

- causes menstrual cycle irregularities for most users, especially during the first 6 months or so
- may decrease bone density with long term use
- weight gain, water retention, breast tenderness
- long term lipid effects are unknown
- requires an injection
- provides no protection against HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted diseases (STD's), such as herpes, gonorrhea, syphilis and the HPV virus. Women who have multiple sexual partners or use IV drugs—or whose sexual partners have other partners or use IV drugs—should use condoms even if they rely on DMPA for pregnancy protection.

Don't Use Depo-Provera if:

- you think you may be pregnant
- you want to be pregnant in the next year or two, because it may take from nine to twenty-four months for return-to-fertility after stopping
- you feel uncomfortable having irregular menstrual bleeding or no bleeding at all
- you will not be able to repeat each shot on a regular 12-week schedule.

Steps to follow

- a complete gyn exam with a PAP smear within 6 months prior to starting the shot.
- the first injection must be within 5 days from the first day of your menstrual period, so make an appointment the day your period starts
- Return to the Health Service every 12 weeks for another injection.
- Depo-Provera tends to make a woman's periods less regular, and spotting between periods is fairly common. Some women stop having periods completely. If your pattern of bleeding concerns you, return to your health care provider to get a blood test for anemia, to rule out the possibility of pregnancy, or to rule out the possibility of infection.