

Facts about injectable contraception

Depot medroxyprogesterone acetate (DMPA) is an injectable drug that prevents pregnancy for three months at a time. Sometimes it is called “the shot.”

How does DMPA work ?

DMPA contains a hormone that prevents ovulation, the process by which an egg is released from the ovary. Preventing ovulation is the primary way the drug works. DMPA is injected into the arm or buttock muscle, where it dissolves slowly and is released into the body over time. The drug's contraceptive effects last for up to 3 months after the injection.

Is it effective ?

DMPA is a highly effective form of birth control. For every 100 women using DMPA, fewer than 1 per year will get pregnant.

Is it safe ?

Yes, DMPA is safe. It has been used by over 30 million women in 90 countries around the world. No deaths have ever been reported from its use. After a thorough review of studies, and the experience of users, the FDA approved the drug for use as a contraceptive in October 1992. A recent study by World Health Organisation (WHO) found no significant increase in the risk of breast cancer or other cancers associated with DMPA. Although one study has suggested that women may experience a small loss of bone density with longterm use, this effect did not increase with DMPA use and appeared to be reversible.

What are the side effects ?

The most common side effects are menstrual changes. Although these changes are not always the same for every woman, they occur in almost all users of injectable contraception. Irregular bleeding and spotting are typical during the first few months. These effects usually decrease over time. However, after one year of use at least 50 % of women do not get their periods. This effect is not medically dangerous, and many women consider it a benefit. Other possible side effects that may occur in a small number of women include weight gain, headache, breast tenderness, and psychological effects such as a loss of libido, depression, nervousness, and fatigue.

Will DMPA hurt my chances of getting pregnant in the future ?

Injectable contraceptives do not have any permanent effects on fertility (the ability to conceive). Studies suggest that the ability to conceive may be delayed for women well beyond 3 months after the last injection. This means that it may take longer to get pregnant after stopping using DMPA than if other methods were used. For example, one study found that in women who stopped using DMPA and wished to become pregnant, 68 % did so within 12 months, 83 % within 15 months, and 93 % within 18 months. It is important to remember that whether there is

a delay in getting pregnant depends on many factors for the individual woman, including her ability to get pregnant before she used DMPA.

Does DMPA protect against AIDS and STDs ?

No, injectable contraceptives do not protect against getting HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, or sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Women need to use latex condoms in addition to injectable contraception to protect against getting AIDS and STDs.

How often do I need to get DMPA ?

Injectable contraception should be given every 3 months.

Who should use DMPA ?

A woman should discuss contraceptive options with her health care provider. DMPA is appropriate for a woman seeking safe, reliable, long-term reversible contraception and may be particularly good for a woman who has had difficulty using the pill or barrier methods consistently.

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