

Birth Control Shot (Depo Provera) Fact Sheet

The birth control shot is given once every 12 weeks. This injection contains a progestin hormone, depot medroxyprogesterone acetate (DMPA), which is similar to hormones made naturally by the body. The shot prevents pregnancy by stopping an egg from being released from the ovary. It also changes the cervical mucus to prevent sperm from reaching an egg.

You must receive an injection once every 12 weeks. If you always receive your injections on time, the birth control shot is 99% effective at preventing pregnancy. For typical women using the shot, it is 94% effective at preventing pregnancy (6 women out of 100 using Depo Provera will become pregnant in a year).

The birth control shot does not protect against sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Condoms are the best way for sexually active people to reduce the risk of infection. Always use a condom if you or your partner has other sex partners or if you are otherwise at risk for STIs.

Advantages of the birth control shot:

- Nothing to do daily or right before sex to prevent pregnancy
- Lighter menstrual periods – for some women, menstrual periods may stop completely
- Decreased pain with menstrual periods
- May improve PMS (premenstrual syndrome) symptoms
- May decrease risk of uterine (endometrial), ovarian, and other cancers
- Can use immediately after giving birth.

Disadvantages of the birth control shot:

- Must return to clinic every 3 months for a shot
- Less effective (higher risk of pregnancy) if you are late receiving your shot
- Likely to have irregular menstrual bleeding or spotting, especially within the first 3-6 months of using the shot. This usually improves over time. Some women stop having periods (this is safe).
- Side effects – The shot is generally well-tolerated, but some women experience side effects such as weight gain, breast tenderness, or changes in mood. The medicine in the shot does not make women gain weight, but it may make some women feel hungrier, which may result in eating more. Women who pay careful attention to their diet and exercise regimen are unlikely to gain weight from the shot.
- It is not possible to discontinue the medicine immediately. You may have continued effects (or side effects) from the medicine for several weeks to months after the last injection.
- Some women may have a delay in getting pregnant after stopping the shot. Most women are able to get pregnant within 6-12 months of stopping the birth control shot. The shot does not cause infertility (sterility/inability to have children).

Risks of using the birth control shot:

- **Decreased bone density** – The shot may cause a decrease in bone mineral density (bone thickness) that is similar to the decrease women experience when pregnant or breastfeeding. However, bone mineral density increases again after stopping the shot, and there is no evidence that this change will result in more fractures (broken bones) or other long-term health problems. Like all women, women using the shot should make sure to exercise and get enough calcium and vitamin D in their diets, or take a vitamin supplement if directed by their healthcare provider.
- **Allergic reaction** – Rarely, women can have an allergic reaction to the shot. Very rarely, this reaction can be severe or life-threatening.

Warning signs – Call your healthcare provider if you:

- Have new symptoms you think might be related to starting the shot

Problem-solving during use:

- If you are more than 15 weeks from your last shot, you are at risk for pregnancy. You should call your provider's office to schedule your next shot as soon as possible. You will need to use a back-up method (wait to have sex or use condoms) until you receive your next shot and for 7 days after. If you had sex without a condom during this period, you should take emergency contraceptive pills (Plan B or Ella) as soon as possible and call your doctor's office.

Regular visits for routine health care, STI and cancer screening are strongly recommended.