

fact sheet

The Shot

The shot is a method of hormonal birth control in the form of a shot that is given every three months. It contains only one hormone -- a progestin. It is also called "Depo Provera," "Depo" or "DMPA."

How does it work?

The progestin in the shot prevents pregnancy by thickening cervical mucus and thinning the lining of the uterine wall. This makes it hard for sperm to reach an egg and for an egg to implant in the uterus.

How well does it work?

When used correctly, the shot is more than 99% effective in preventing pregnancy. However, most people do not use it perfectly and may get a shot late every once in a while, so the shot is 94% effective with typical use.

The shot does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

How do I take it?

The shot is administered at a doctor's office, clinic, or pharmacy every three months (12 weeks). It can be administered into the muscle of the upper arm or buttock.

There's a newer version of the shot that you can give yourself at home by injecting it right under the skin in the abdomen (Depo-SubQ Provera).

What if I forget to get it on time?

The shot is thought to be effective in preventing pregnancy for up to 14 weeks. If you are more than two weeks late in receiving the shot, verify that you are not pregnant before getting your next shot and use a backup method of birth control (like condoms) for seven days. Consider using emergency contraception if you had unprotected sex.

What are some side effects I might experience?

The most common side effect is irregular bleeding -- such as spotting and breakthrough bleeding. This usually resolves after the first six to twelve months of use. Some users have no period at all. The shot can also cause weight gain and reversible bone weakness, as well as headaches, abdominal pain, dizziness, nervousness, and weakness. Rarely, users experience changes in mood, libido, appetite, hair, and skin.

What if I want to get pregnant soon?

The shot may not be the best option for individuals who want to get pregnant within the next year. It can take more than ten months to become pregnant after your last shot.

Is it right for me?

The shot is an effective, private, convenient, and pill-free method of birth control that is safe for most people. The shot is a safe option for persons who cannot take estrogen-containing medicines like the pill, the patch, and the ring.

Other important factors to consider are personal comfort with receiving injections and ability to remember to schedule appointments or walk-in for the shot every three months.