

fact sheet

The Shot

The shot is a method of hormonal birth control in the form of a shot given every 3 months. It contains only one hormone, a progestin. It is known by the brand name Depo-Provera (given as an injection into muscle) and the newer Depo-SubQ Provera (given as an injection into fat). The shot does NOT protect against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

How does it work?

The progestin in the shot prevents pregnancy by preventing the release of an egg, thickening cervical mucus, and thinning the lining of the uterine wall. All these events make it difficult to get pregnant.

How well does it work?

When used correctly, the shot is more than 99% effective in preventing pregnancy, but getting it late every once in a while is common, so the shot is 94% effective with typical use.

How do I take it?

Depo-Provera is administered by a healthcare provider every 12 weeks. It is injected into the muscle of the upper arm or buttock. You can give yourself the Depo-SubQ Provera by injecting into the fat right under the skin of the abdomen or thigh. Use backup contraception, like condoms, for 7 days after the first injection to give the hormone time to start working.

Depo-SubQ Provera

1. Wash your hands and pick an area you'd like to inject (thigh or stomach). Clean it with an alcohol wipe and allow to dry.
2. Shake the medication in the syringe, and attach the needle.
3. Pinch the section of skin where you will inject.
4. Stick the needle in at an angle and inject slowly for 5-7 seconds until the plunger is fully depressed.
5. Pull the needle out and engage the safety shield until you hear a click.
6. Throw the needle and syringe away in a sharps container.
7. Apply pressure to the injection spot.

What if I forget to get it on time?

The shot is thought to be effective for up to 16 weeks. If it's been more than 16 weeks since your last shot, make sure you are not pregnant before getting your next one, and use backup birth control, like condoms, for 7 days and repeat a pregnancy test 2 weeks later. Consider using emergency contraception if you had unprotected sex more than 16 weeks after your last shot. (Find the emergency contraception fact sheet [here](#).)

What are some side effects I might experience?

The most common side effect is irregular bleeding such as spotting. This usually resolves after the first 6-12 months of use. Some users stop getting periods altogether after 2-3 shots. The shot can also cause weight gain and reversible bone weakness, as well as headaches, stomach pain, dizziness, and weakness. Rarely, users experience changes in mood, sex drive, appetite, hair, and skin.

What if I want to get pregnant soon?

The shot may not be the best option for those who want to get pregnant within the next year. On average, it takes 10 months to become pregnant after the 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. It is a safe option for those who cannot take birth control that contains estrogen, like the pill, patch, and ring. It is also one of the more effective birth control options for overweight women, and it is safe to use while breastfeeding. Other important factors to consider are personal comfort with receiving and giving injections (for Depo-SubQ Provera) as well as the ability to remember scheduling shots every 12 weeks.