



# Birth Control Injection

## What is the Birth Control (BC) Injection?

The BC injection is commonly referred to by the brand name Depo-Provera® and it is given to an individual with uterus, every 10-13 weeks (4 times a year) to help prevent pregnancy. Each injection contains only one hormone, a progestin, which is similar to a naturally occurring one that helps to control fertility. The injection prevents ovulation, meaning there is no egg released and therefore, no egg can become fertilized. The specific mechanism of the BC injection is different from another hormonal BC like the pill, patch, or ring.

## How Does the BC Injection Prevent Pregnancy?

The BC injection affects a menstrual cycle and prevents pregnancy in three ways:

1. The ovaries temporarily stop hormone production and in turn, ovulation (the release of an egg) does not take place.
2. The cervix (opening to the uterus) produces thicker mucus, making it difficult for sperm to travel to the uterus.
3. The inner lining of the uterus becomes very thin or non-existent, which makes it difficult for a fertilized egg to attach to that lining if ovulation (exceptionally rarely) happens to occur.

## How Effective is the BC Injection?

The BC injection is 97% effective in protecting against pregnancy. Unlike the pill, patch, and ring, there is little room for error when using the injection as a method of BC as long as the individual is getting their injections on time.

Remember that no BC method is 100% effective; therefore, you always have some risk of pregnancy if you are sexually active.

**Since the BC injection only protects against pregnancy, individuals will still need to use condoms consistently and properly for protection against sexually transmitted infections.**

## **Which BC Injections Are Available?**

Depo-Provera ® is the only brand available in Canada.

## **How Do I Get Started?**

Once an individual has discussed the use of the BC injection with their healthcare provider and has decided to start using this method, they will need to get a prescription for Depo-Provera® from her health care provider. Once their prescription is filled, the individual will return to their healthcare provider for the injection. An individual will need to have their first injection between day 1 and 5 of their menstrual cycle. **Please note that the first day of the menstrual period is day 1 of the cycle.** If an individual has her injection between day 1 and 5 of their cycle, they are protected immediately against pregnancy.

If injected *after* the first 5 days of their cycle, the individual will not have protection against pregnancy for the first 3 to 4 weeks after the injection. Therefore, a back-up birth control method (i.e. condoms) must be used during this time.

## **How Do I Get into the Routine?**

When an individual receives their first injection, they are protected against pregnancy for ~3 months. The individual will have to return to their healthcare provider for an injection every 10 to 13 weeks after the first injection for continued protection against pregnancy.

### **Warning:**

You should never go more than 13 weeks without getting an injection. An individual should always call their healthcare professional ahead of time to make an appointment between the 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> week.

This contraceptive method does require planning ahead.

If an injection is missed or more than 13 weeks go by, an alternate BC method (i.e. condoms) should be used until after the next injection. After receiving this late injection, the individual will need to wait 3 to 4 weeks for it to be effective in protecting against pregnancy again.

Also, the healthcare provider should determine if the individual is pregnant before giving the dose.

## **What Should I Expect During the First Year of Use?**

### **First Dose: 1 to 3 Months**

During these 3 months, the individual's body will be adjusting to the new hormone. An individual can expect to experience irregular spotting and bleeding. These side effects will

generally lessen overtime. However, if the individual has unusually heavy bleeding, they should talk with their health care provider.

### **Second Dose: 3 to 6 Months**

Hormonal birth control has been associated with weight changes. The important thing to remember is that hormonal birth control itself does not cause an individual to gain weight. However, the birth control injection has a tendency to increase an individual's appetite, which can cause weight gain.

Since the body is still adjusting to the new hormone at this stage, the individual will be experiencing several changes. If they are still experiencing irregular spotting and bleeding, it should decrease. For many, spotting decreases with each injection, and periods may stop altogether.

### **Third Dose: 6 to 9 Months**

For many individuals, their periods will have stopped at this point. More than half of all individuals who use the birth control injection are period-free after the first year of use.

### **Fourth Dose: 9 to 12 Months**

The individual's body should be adjusted to the new level of hormone from the injections. As long as the individual is having their injections on time, they are experiencing great continued protection against pregnancy.

If an individual decides to become pregnant, they will need to stop taking the birth control injection, and there will be a delay of 9-10 months before they are once again fertile. Most individuals can become pregnant within one year after the effects of the last dose of the birth control injection. For others, it can take up to two years to become pregnant. Remember that everyone, and every body is different. If an individual plans on becoming pregnant within the next year, the birth control injection may not be the best option for them.

## **How Long Should I Use the BC Injection?**

If an individual is looking for a long-term birth control method, it is important for them to speak with their healthcare provider about the risks and benefits of using this method for longer than 2 years.

One serious side effect of using the birth control injection is that it may cause individuals to lose calcium stored in their bones. The longer an individual uses the birth control injection, the more calcium they are likely to lose. Also, the calcium may not return completely once this method is stopped. This is of particular concern when the birth control injection is used during teenage years when bone mineral density should be building up. Loss of calcium may cause weak, porous bones that could increase the risk of bones breaking, especially after menopause. Generally, an individual should use the birth control injection long term (more than 2 years) only if other birth control methods are not right for them.

## **The Birth Control Injection is a Good Alternative for Individuals...**

- Who cannot take birth control methods that contain estrogen.
- Who have difficulty with remembering to use daily/weekly birth control methods.
  - Who are over the age of 35 and smoke.
  - Who suffer from migraine headaches.
    - Who are breastfeeding.
  - Who suffer from sickle cell disease.
    - Who have endometriosis.
  - Who take anti-seizure medication.

## **Who Should Not Use the Birth Control Injection?**

- Individuals who are already pregnant.
- Individuals with unexplained vaginal bleeding other than menstrual periods.
  - Individuals with rare liver disease.
- Individuals with a history of blood clots, stroke or inflammation of the veins.
- Individuals who are allergic to any ingredients in the birth control injection.
  - Individuals who cannot tolerate bleeding irregularities.
- Individuals who cannot make regular appointments every 12 weeks for a follow-up injection.
- Individuals who want to get pregnant quickly after stopping their birth control method.

If you have further questions regarding birth control options or you would like to see a health care provider regarding any sexual health matter, please contact us.

## **Sexual Health Questions? We have Answers!**

Location: 47 St. Clare's Avenue, St. John's, NL, A1C 2J9

Hours of Operation:

Monday: 9am - 4:30pm

Tuesday: 9am - 4:30pm

Wednesday: 9am - 4:30pm

Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm

Friday: 9am - 4:30pm

Contact:

Telephone: 709-579-1009

Toll free 1-877-NO MYTHS (1-877-666-9847)

**Website:** [www.plannedparenthoodnlshc.com](http://www.plannedparenthoodnlshc.com)

**Email:** pp.nlshc@gmail.com

**Revised July 2020**