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## DEPO PROVERA

### WHAT IS IT?

Depo Provera ("Depo") is a hormonal method of birth control which works by preventing ovulation, thickening the cervical mucous, and thinning the lining of the uterus. Depo Provera contains medroxyprogesterone acetate, a chemical similar to the natural hormone progesterone that is produced by a woman's ovaries. It is given by injection once every 12 weeks and is more than 99 percent effective in preventing pregnancy.

### WHO CAN USE IT?

Because Depo does not contain estrogen, it is considered safe for many women who cannot use birth control pills. For instance, women who smoke, have high blood pressure, high cholesterol, headaches, or leg pain can use Depo. Women with a history of diabetes, seizures, or blood clots may also be able to use this method. Unlike other hormonal birth control methods, Depo is safe for women who have just had a baby and women who are breast feeding.

### WHO SHOULD NOT USE IT?

Certain women should not use Depo. Please let your provider know if:

- You think you might be pregnant
- You have any vaginal bleeding without a known reason
- You have had cancer of the breast
- You have had a stroke
- You have or have had blood clots in your legs
- You have problems with your liver
- You are allergic to Depo-Provera

- You are planning a pregnancy within the next 2 years (It usually takes from 4 to 31 months after ending Depo use to return to fertility, regardless of how long a woman has used Depo.)
- You have an increased risk of fracture and/or low bone mass based on results of your recent bone density test

## HOW IS IT USED?

The first shot is given within the first 5 days of a menstrual cycle (5 days from the first day of bleeding). Subsequent injections are given every 12 weeks. You do not need to use a back up method of birth control as long as you have received your Depo injections as above. If a Depo Provera user does not return for subsequent shots, she must use another method of birth control to prevent pregnancy.

## WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE SIDE EFFECTS?

The most common side effect is irregular bleeding including spotting, more frequent bleeding or no bleeding at all. With continued use bleeding usually decreases and many women stop having periods completely. It is normal to have unpredictable bleeding while taking this medication. Any woman uncomfortable with varying cycles may want to consider another method.

Depo use may also cause a delay in return to fertility. It may take up to 2 years to become pregnant after stopping the shots. However, most women can conceive within 12 months. In addition, two-thirds of women using Depo in the clinical trials experienced weight gain of approximately 5 lbs. in the first year. Many continued to gain weight at the rate of about 3 pounds each year after the first year. Also, Depo Provera may cause a reduction in HDL ("good" cholesterol) levels. BMC may require a baseline lipid panel before the first injection.

Uncommon but potential side effects include: breast tenderness, mood changes, decreased sex drive, pelvic pain, backache, leg cramps, headaches, abdominal cramps, dizziness, weakness or fatigue, vaginal discharge or irritation, swelling of hands and feet, acne, hair loss, rash, hot flashes, or joint pain.

Studies show a possible slight increase in the risk of breast cancer among Depo users. This increase is not associated with long-term use and the likelihood of developing breast cancer is small even among users at greatest risk (strong family history, high fat diet etc.).

Depo Provera use may also cause a decrease in bone minerals. This decrease in minerals may increase a woman's risk of developing bone fractures. With adequate calcium and vitamin D intake, and participation in a weight bearing exercise program, women may recover their bone minerals when Depo is stopped.

The following are considered **WARNING SIGNS** of more severe side effects:

- severe lower abdominal pain
- prolonged heavy vaginal bleeding
- migraine or severe headaches
- severe pain, swelling or numbness in arms or legs
- frequent urination
- depression

- shortness of breath or sharp chest pain
- vision problems or dizziness
- swelling or redness at the injection site

Depo users experiencing any of these symptoms should contact the Clinic as soon as possible. BMC has a 24 hour emergency service accessible through 721-1646 or 800-727-2546.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

Depo Provera is highly effective in the prevention of pregnancy (99.7%). Some women also experience decreased menstrual cramps, blood flow, and premenstrual symptoms. Depo may be used by breast feeding women and may increase the length of time a woman is able to produce milk.

Depo Provera is not a barrier form of birth control and therefore does not protect against sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) including HIV. Safer sex is encouraged by using a barrier method of birth control such as condoms.