

## Skidmore College Health Services

### Depo-Provera Fact Sheet

#### **What is Depo-Provera?**

Depo-Provera is an injection containing the hormone depo-medroxyprogesterone acetate (DMPA), which is similar to the progesterone made by a woman's ovaries. It does not contain estrogen. Like other hormonal birth control methods including the pill, Depo-Provera causes a resting state in your ovaries. Since your ovaries do not release an egg each month, you cannot get pregnant. DMPA is injected into the buttock or upper arm every 13 weeks.

#### **Effectiveness of Depo-Provera:**

DMPA is one of the most effective reversible methods of birth control. It is 97-99.7% effective, making it one of the most reliable methods of birth control. You only need to get your injection once every 3 months (13 weeks).

#### **How This Shot is Used:**

After reviewing your medical and gynecological history and a gynecological exam within the past year, the clinician will inject the hormone into your buttock or upper arm. Protection against pregnancy is immediate if you get DMPA during the first five days of your period. Otherwise, use an additional method of contraception for the first seven days.

**Do not have an injection if there is a chance that you are pregnant.** Be sure to tell the clinician if you think there is any chance that you are.

A woman must receive this shot every three months. There is no way to stop the effects of the DMPA during this time so side effects from the DMPA may continue until the shot wears off (12-14 weeks). If you wish to become pregnant, it can take 3-18 months after your last shot. It is important to get your injections on time. It is safe to have your injection several weeks early if your 3-month date (13 weeks) is not convenient. If you wait longer than 13 weeks, you will no longer be protected. Use another reliable form of birth control (like condoms) or don't engage in sexual activity until you get your injection.

#### **Advantages of Depo-Provera:**

- nothing to put in place before vaginal intercourse
- effective for 3 months
- no medicine to take every day
- helps prevent cancer of the lining of the uterus
- can be used by women who cannot take estrogen

#### **A Woman Should Not Use Depo-Provera if She:**

- has unexplained bleeding from the vagina
- is or might be pregnant
- has had breast cancer
- is taking medicine for Cushing's Syndrome
- cannot put up with irregular bleeding or loss of her period
- wants to become pregnant within 18 months

Some women can use DMPA under close medical supervision even if they have

- diabetes
- worsening or severe depression
- a recent history of liver disease, such as hepatitis, or abnormal results on liver function tests
- high blood pressure
- high risk for heart disease
- serious blood clotting conditions

### **Possible Disadvantages of Depo-Provera**

Irregular bleeding is the most common side effect for women using DMPA.

- Periods become fewer and lighter for most women-in time, they may stop altogether. It can take up to a year for periods to begin again after a woman stops using DMPA.
- Some women will have longer and heavier periods.
- Some women may have more light spotting and breakthrough bleeding.

These side effects are more common in the first six to twelve months of use. The longer a woman uses DMPA, the more likely she will be to stop having menstrual periods. Over half of DMPA users have no periods after one year of use.

Less common side effects include:

- headache
- nausea
- dizziness
- sore breasts
- change of appetite, weight gain
- depression
- hair loss, or increased hair on the face or body
- nervousness
- skin rash or spotty darkening of the skin
- change in sex drive

### **Depo-Provera is indicated for the prevention of pregnancy and does not prevent against HIV or sexually transmitted diseases.**

In the very rare case that pregnancy occurs during the use of DMPA, there is an increased chance that the pregnancy will be ectopic. Ectopic pregnancies are life threatening. They usually are eliminated medically or removed with surgery. Contact your clinician immediately if you have any symptoms of pregnancy, including:

- irregular bleeding
- severe lower abdominal pain
- nausea and breast tenderness

### **Warning Signs for Depo-Provera:**

Serious problems are rare. Tell your clinician immediately if you have any of the warning signs:

- severe pain in the stomach or abdomen
- unusually heavy or prolonged vaginal bleeding
- a new lump in your breast
- major depression
- yellowing of the skin or eyes