



Discussion Guide

For Adults Working with Teens

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How I Got "the Shot"

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I've been in relationships before, but never felt ready for sex. Whether it was because of my boyfriend or me, sex was never something I wanted to do. Don't get me wrong, the temptation presented itself, but I'd never given it more than a short thought.

Even though my religion says sex is for marriage, I think sex should be for love. I love my boyfriend, and I was the one to bring up sex. After ten months together, he'd never pressured me into anything. When we finally discussed sex, he made it clear that he was happy with us not having it.



Photography by Dan Strange

Once I decided to have it, he repeatedly told me that if I changed my mind, he

was OK with it. But I knew that whatever happens with us in the future, I wouldn't regret my decision.

Getting Protected

I knew that before I'd even consider actually having sex, I'd need to be on birth control. I refuse to risk becoming pregnant. My town is fortunate enough to have a clinic where teens can go for confidential birth control. A week after "the talk" with my boyfriend, I called the clinic and made an appointment.

Before I went, I decided to do some homework on birth control. My parents, being extremely conservative, would flip out if they even suspected I was having sex. So, I wanted birth control that was effective and confidential. That's why I decided to ask for Depo-Provera, also known as "the shot."

Depo Facts

Depo-Provera is a prescription injection you get every three months. It contains a hormone similar to the chemical progesterone, which is found naturally in the female body. Like other forms of hormonal birth control, Depo-Provera prevents ovulation (the release of a female's egg from her ovaries), therefore making fertilization and pregnancy almost impossible.

The most common side effect of Depo-Provera is irregular menstrual bleeding. A female might have spotting between periods. Her periods may also become slightly heavier or lighter and less frequent. Many women on Depo eventually stop having periods while on it. Other possible side effects include slight weight gain, breast swelling or tenderness, stomachache, headache, or depression.

Despite all these, what attracted me so much to Depo is that it's more than 99-percent effective and incredibly simple. Only one shot every three months does the trick. And since it's an injection, it's hard for anyone to know you're on it. Privacy was important to me, since I can't imagine the scene if my parents found a pack of birth control pills in my purse.

At the Clinic

My boyfriend came with me to the clinic for emotional support. Although I wasn't exactly scared, I'd been nervous the entire day.

Since it was my first visit to the clinic, I had to spend about 20 minutes filling out forms about my health history, ways to be contacted, etc. When I finished, I went with a petite nurse into a small office. She introduced herself and, together, we discussed my history, my decision to have sex, and my birth control options.

Because I do not have unusual vaginal bleeding or a history of breast cancer, stroke, blood clots, or liver disease, the nurse agreed that Depo-Provera was a good choice, along with condoms—since Depo-Provera, like all other types of hormonal birth control, DOESN'T provide protection against sexually transmitted diseases (STIs).

The nurse informed me that, in addition to the visit cost, the shot is \$35. We set up an appointment for the following week and she gave me a pile of pamphlets to read about Depo.

My boyfriend and I looked over the information and discussed our decision some more. The next week, I went back to the clinic to get the shot.

The First Shot

A different nurse greeted me this time, but she was already familiar with my records and immediately put me at ease. I read and signed a consent form while she asked if I had any more questions. The form stated that I was aware of the possible side effects of the shot and that I would notify the clinic if I experienced anything abnormal.

There are two places on the body most women get the shot: the arm and the upper buttocks/lower back. I asked the nurse which one hurt less. She said the upper buttocks, because most women have more fat on the lower back, so it's usually less sore afterwards.

I listened to her advice and—with a small pinch that lasted about three seconds—I became protected against pregnancy for three months. (Depo works immediately when a female gets the shot within the first five days of her period.)

Easy & Effective

I was amazed at how simple it all was, and I'm extremely happy that I chose Depo-Provera. My boyfriend and I also consistently use latex condoms, since the clinic advised that we practice two methods of birth control (to also protect against STDs).

My nurses were friendly and helpful and didn't make me feel as if my decision was something to be ashamed about. Rather, they felt that it was responsible of me to start birth control before I began having sex.

If the cost of birth control is an issue to anyone having sex, consider this: it's much cheaper to prevent a pregnancy than to pay for one. Also, most clinics (including Planned Parenthood health centers) have sliding-scale fees, meaning that you pay only what you can afford.

Going to the clinic took less than two hours out of my life, but it took the worry of getting pregnant out of my mind. Now that's a good deal.

Editors' Note: For more info on Depo-Provera, log on to www.depo-provera.com, call **1-866-554-DEPO (3376)** and/or contact your doctor or health care provider. If you don't have one, look in the yellow pages under "clinics" or "family planning." Or call **1-800-230-PLAN (7526)** to find a Planned Parenthood in your area.

Why the Drop in Teen Pregnancy?

The United States has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the developed world, but it has gotten progressively lower each year over the last decade. Why is the rate getting lower?

To find out, researchers at the Alan Guttmacher Institute, a sexual and reproductive health research organization, compared data on teen sexual behavior and pregnancy rates from different years.

Their research showed that some of the drop is due to some teens choosing abstinence, but more of the drop is due to the increased use of birth control,

including more effective methods, by teens who have sexual intercourse. For example, these teens are choosing long-term hormonal methods.

In other words, while some teens are choosing to say "no" to sex, many others are becoming savvy about their birth control options.

—Christina Corea, 18, Staff Writer