PROTECT YOURSELF + PROTECT YOUR PARTNER

genital HPV

THE FACTS

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- Genital human papillomavirus (/pap pil LO ma VY rus/) (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted virus in the United States. At least 50% of sexually active people will have genital HPV at some time in their lives.
- Most people who have genital HPV don't know they have it. There are often no symptoms, and it goes away on its own—without causing any serious health problems.
- HPV is passed on through genital contact (such as vaginal and anal sex). You can pass HPV to others without knowing it.
- There is no cure for HPV, but there are treatments for the health problems that some types of HPV can cause, like genital warts and cervical cancer.

PROTECT YOURSELF + PROTECT YOUR PARTNER

HOW CAN I LOWER MY RISK FOR HPV?

- The surest way to prevent HPV is not to have sex.
- If you decide to be sexually active, limit the number of partners you have. The fewer sex partners you have, the less likely you will be to get HPV.
- Condoms may lower chances of getting HPV, genital warts, or cervical cancer if used the right way every time you have sex. However, HPV can infect areas that are not covered by a condom—so you should not expect condoms to fully protect against HPV.
- Washing the genitals, urinating, or douching after sex will not prevent any sexually transmitted disease.
- Females and males can get vaccinated to protect against the types of HPV that most commonly cause health problems. These vaccines are given in 3 doses over 6 months. **The vaccines are most effective when all doses are received before a person has sexual contact with his or her first partner.**

How does someone get HPV?

Anyone who has ever had genital contact with another person can have genital HPV. Both men and women can get it—and pass it on—without even realizing it.

What are the health effects of HPV?

Genital HPV does not cause health problems for most people.

There are many types of HPV. All HPV infections are either low-risk or high-risk. Low-risk HPV infections can cause genital warts. The warts are usually painless and not a serious problem. They can be flat or raised, single or in groups, and small or large. Without treatment, the warts may grow in size and number, or they may go away on their own.

Women with HPV might have warts on the vagina, vulva, or cervix. Men with HPV might have warts on the penis, scrotum, or groin. Both men and women can have genital warts on the anus or thigh.

High-risk HPV infections can sometimes develop into cancer of the cervix (the opening of the womb). These infections may also lead to other cancers, such as anal cancer. In some people, high-risk HPV infections can persist and cause cell changes. If these cell changes are not treated, they may lead to cancer over time.

It is only persistent HPV infections (the kind that don't go away for years) that put people at risk for cancer. The types of HPV that can cause cancer are not the same as the types that can cause genital warts.

More important information about HPV

IF YOU ARE A WOMAN

It's important to know about the link between HPV and cervical cancer and about the steps you can take to prevent this disease. Getting 3 doses of an HPV vaccine and getting regular screening can prevent cervical cancer. One HPV vaccine brand (Gardasil) can also prevent most genital warts.

IF YOU ARE A MAN

It's important to know that you can have genital HPV—and pass it to your partner—even if you have no symptoms. Some types of HPV can lead to cancer of the anus and penis, but these cancers are rare in men with healthy immune systems.

There is one vaccine brand (Gardasil) to prevent the most common problem caused by HPV in men, genital warts. This vaccine is available for 9-to-26 year-old males.

Does having HPV mean I'll get cancer?

No. Most types of HPV infection don't lead to cancer. Women can protect themselves from cervical cancer by getting regular Pap tests and by getting treated early for any problems that could turn into cancer.

Do I need to know if I have HPV?

There is no reason to be tested just to find out if you have genital HPV. Most people will have genital HPV at some time in their lives. Usually the infection goes away on its own. However, it is very important for women to get screened for cervical cancer that is caused by genital HPV.

IF YOU ARE A WOMAN

You should get regular Pap tests to check for changes in your cervix. The Pap test is the best way to screen for cervical cancer. Changes that are caught early can be treated before they lead to cancer.

If you are 30 or over, or if the result of your Pap test is unclear, a doctor may also give you an HPV test. This test can help the doctor decide what other tests or treatment you should have.

IF YOU ARE A MAN

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not approved a test for HPV in men. See your doctor if you have genital warts.

Can HPV be treated?

- There is no treatment for genital HPV itself. Most of the time, though, your body fights off the virus on its own.
- There are treatments for the health problems that genital HPV can cause, like genital warts, cervical changes, and cervical cancer.
- Even after genital warts are treated, the virus may remain in the body. This means that you may still pass HPV to your sex partners.

What about a vaccine?

Females and males can get vaccinated to protect against the types of HPV that most commonly cause health problems. These vaccines are given in 3 doses over 6 months. **The vaccines are most effective when all doses are received before a person has sexual contact with his or her first partner.**

- Two brands of HPV vaccine (Cervarix and Gardasil) are available to protect females against the types of HPV that cause most cervical cancers. One of these vaccines (Gardasil) also protects against most genital warts.
- Doctors recommend that all 11- and 12- year-old girls get vaccinated against HPV. HPV vaccination is also recommended for women up to age 26 if they did not get all 3 vaccine doses when they were younger.
- Regardless of which brand of HPV vaccine a girl or woman gets, it is important that she get the same one for all 3 doses. Even after receiving 3 vaccine doses, it is also important for women to get Pap tests as recommended. One available vaccine (Gardasil) protects males against most genital warts. This vaccine is available for boys and men, 9 through 26 years of age.

A message for everyone

PROTECT YOURSELF AND YOUR PARTNER.

Most people who have sex will have HPV at some time in their lives. HPV usually goes away on its own without causing any health problems.

If you're a woman, it's **very** important to have regular Pap tests to check for problems that could develop into cervical cancer. Most women who get cervical cancer have not had regular Pap tests.

There is no blame, no shame about having genital HPV. The virus is very common.

If you have HPV, don't blame your current partner or assume your partner is cheating. People can have genital HPV for a very long time before it is detected. Talk openly and honestly with your partner about HPV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

For more information

- Talk to your doctor.
- Call 1-800-CDC-INFO.
- Visit www.cdc.gov/std/hpv.

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