

HPV

What is HPV?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is one of the most common Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs). There are more than 40 HPV types that can infect the genital areas of men and women, including the skin of the penis, vulva (area outside the vagina), and anus, and the linings of the vagina, cervix, and rectum, and areas around the mouth. Most people who become infected with HPV do not even know they have it.

What are the signs and symptoms of HPV?

Most strains of HPV show no symptoms at all, and in many cases (almost 90%) the body's immune system will clear the virus within a year or two. Some strains cause painless warts to grow on the genitals (vagina, penis, rectum) in both men and women. Other HPV strains can lead to cervical cancer and as well as cancers of the vulva, vagina, anus, and penis.

- **Genital Warts** usually appear as small white or skin-colored bumps or groups of bumps, usually in the genital area. Warts may appear within weeks or months after sexual contact with an infected person.
- **Cervical Cancer** shows no signs until it becomes advanced. However, a gynecologist (doctor for women) can swab the cervix during a routine pap smear to look for abnormal cells, which can be early signs of cancer. Women should get a pap smear once a year.
- **Oral Cancer** can also develop from HPV acquired through oral sex. Men are 35% more likely than women to develop HPV related oral cancer, but both men and women are at risk.
- **Anal Cancer** is abnormal cellular growth in and around the anus. In the general population anal cancer is fairly rare; about one in 100,000 people, but in men who have sex with men (MSM), the rate is about 35 in 100,000. MSM who are HIV+ are twice as likely to get anal cancer than MSM who are HIV-. Anal cancer can be successfully treated if diagnosed early. While anal cancer is not limited to men, it is the only cancer more common in men than women. Yearly anal pap tests are recommended for gay, bisexual, and MSM.

20 million Americans are currently infected with HPV. At least 80-90% of sexually active men and women acquire genital HPV infection at some point in their lives.



How is HPV transmitted? HPV is transmitted through genital skin to skin contact, usually through vaginal, anal, or oral sex.

Is there a Treatment for HPV? HPV is a virus so it cannot be cured. However, in many cases the body's immune system is strong enough to fight off the virus. There is treatment for HPV related diseases such as cervical cancer and genital warts.

How can I protect myself from HPV ?

- A **VACCINE** can now protect females from the four types of HPV that cause most cervical cancer and genital warts. The vaccine is recommended to females from the ages of 9-26. **Even if you already have one strain of HPV, the vaccine can still protect you from at least three other strains that could otherwise lead to cancer or genital warts.**
- **CONDOMS** can also reduce the risk of getting HPV and HPV related diseases. However, since HPV can affect areas not fully covered by a condom, the only way to completely prevent HPV is to avoid sexual contact.
- **ROUTINE PAP TESTS** can help women and girls **lower the risk of developing cervical cancer.** A pap test is used to screen for cervical cancer and other cancers by detecting any abnormal or precancerous cells in the cervix so they can be removed before the cancer has a chance to develop. Even women who have gotten the vaccine should be screened because the vaccine only prevents 4 types of HPV .

Can I be tested for HPV? There is a highly accurate test for HPV for women. Because HPV commonly clears itself among young women, this test is only recommended for women over 30. However, men and women of all ages should get tested for HPV related diseases. Genital Warts is usually diagnosed by a visual inspection of the genitals. Cervical cancer can be screened for in women and girls using a pap test which identifies cell abnormalities that can lead to cervical cancer. There is no FDA approved test for HPV in men. Most men with HPV will never develop health problems from it. Finding out if you are infected with HPV is not as important as finding out if you have the diseases it can cause, such as cancer.