



About Genital HPV Infection

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For Everyone

KEY POINTS

- Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI) that can be treated.
- People who are sexually active can get HPV.
- This fact sheet answers basic questions about HPV.



Overview

What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is the most common STI. There are many different types of HPV. While most do not cause any health problems, some types can cause genital warts and cancers. [Vaccines](#) can stop these health problems from happening. HPV is a different virus than [HIV](#) and [HSV](#) (herpes).

Signs and symptoms

How do I know if I have HPV?

Genital HPV often has no symptoms, but it can cause serious health problems, even without symptoms.

Most people with HPV never develop symptoms or health problems from it.

In most cases (9 out of 10), HPV goes away on its own within two years without health problems. When HPV does not go away, it can cause health problems like genital warts and cancer. The types of HPV that cause warts do not cause cancer.

Talk to your healthcare provider if you notice any of the following in your genital area, mouth, or throat:

- Warts
- Unusual growths
- Lumps
- Sores

What are the symptoms of genital warts?

Genital warts usually appear as a small bump or group of bumps in the genital area. They can be small or large, raised or flat, or shaped like a cauliflower. The warts may go away, stay the same, or grow in size or number. A healthcare provider can usually diagnose genital warts by looking at them. Genital warts can come back, even after treatment.

Risk factors

Am I at risk for HPV?

You can get HPV by having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has the virus. A person with HPV can pass the infection to someone even when they have no signs or symptoms.

If you are sexually active, you can get HPV, even if you have had sex with only one person. You also can develop symptoms years after having sex with someone who has the infection. This makes it hard to know when you first got it.

How it spreads

How is HPV spread?

HPV is most commonly spread during vaginal or anal sex. It also spreads through close skin-to-skin touching during sex. A person with HPV can pass the infection to someone even when they have no signs or symptoms.

Prevention

How can I avoid HPV and the health problems it can cause?

You can do several things to lower your chances of getting HPV and avoiding the health problems it can cause.

[Get vaccinated](#). The HPV vaccine is safe and effective. It can protect against diseases (including cancers) caused by HPV when given in the recommended age groups.

[Get screened](#) for cervical cancer. Routine screening for women aged 21 to 65 years old can prevent cervical cancer.

If you are sexually active:

- Use condoms [the right way](#) every time you have sex. This can lower your chances of getting HPV. But HPV can infect areas the condom does not cover. So, condoms may not fully protect against getting HPV.
- Be in a mutually monogamous relationship or have sex only with someone who only has sex with you.

If you or your partner have genital warts, stop having sex until you no longer have warts. We do not know how long a person is able to spread HPV after warts go away.

I'm pregnant. Will having HPV affect my pregnancy?

Pregnant women with HPV can get genital warts or develop abnormal cell changes on the cervix. Routine cervical cancer screening can help find abnormal cell changes. You should get routine cervical cancer screening even when you are pregnant.

Testing and diagnosis

How will my healthcare provider know if I have HPV?

There is no test to find out a person's "HPV status." Also, there is no approved HPV test to find HPV in the mouth or throat.

There are HPV tests that can screen for cervical cancer. Healthcare providers only use these tests for screening women aged 30 years and older. HPV tests are not recommended to screen men, adolescents, or women under the age of 30 years.

Most people with HPV do not know they have the infection. They never develop symptoms or health problems from it. Some people find out they have HPV when they get genital warts. Women may find out they have HPV when they get an abnormal Pap test result (during cervical cancer screening). Others may only find out once they've developed more serious problems from HPV, such as cancers.

Treatment and recovery

Is there treatment for HPV or health problems that develop from HPV?

There is no treatment for the virus itself. However, there are treatments for the health problems that HPV can cause:

1. **Genital warts** can go away with treatment from your healthcare provider or with prescription medicine. If left untreated, genital warts may go away, stay the same, or grow in size or number.
2. **Cervical precancer** treatment is available. Women who get routine Pap tests and follow up as needed can find problems *before* cancer develops. Prevention is always better than treatment. For more information visit [cancer.org](https://www.cancer.org).

3. **Other HPV-related cancers** are also more treatable when found and treated early. For more information visit [cancer.org](#) .

Related conditions

Does HPV cause cancer?

HPV can cause cervical and other [cancers](#), including cancer of the vulva, vagina, penis, or anus. It can also cause cancer in the back of the throat (called oropharyngeal cancer). This can include the base of the tongue and tonsils.

Cancer often takes years, even decades, to develop after a person gets HPV. Genital warts and cancers result from different types of HPV.

There is no way to know who will develop cancer or other health problems from HPV. People with weak immune systems (including those with HIV) may be less able to fight off HPV. They may also be more likely to develop health problems from HPV.

Resources

[STI Fact Sheets](#)

[STIs during Pregnancy Fact Sheet](#)

[Primary Prevention Methods \(Condoms\)](#)

[CDC-INFO](#)

[CDC National Prevention Information Network \(NPIN\)](#)

[American Sexual Health Association \(ASHA\)](#) 

SOURCES

CONTENT SOURCE:
[National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and Tuberculosis Prevention](#); [About Division of STD Prevention](#)

SOURCES

- [Division of STD Prevention](#)
- [National Center for HIV, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)