



Human Papilloma virus

What is the Human papillomavirus?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the world. There are several types of HPV. Some types can cause cervical cancers and genital warts.

How is HPV spread?

HPV is spread through skin to skin contact with an infected partner.

What are the symptoms?

Most people never get symptoms but they still carry the virus and can infect their sexual partner(s). Symptoms may not appear for months after exposure to the virus.

If genital warts are visible they:

- May be small, cauliflower-like bumps, alone or in clusters
- Can be on the vulva (vaginal lips), the cervix (entrance to uterus), anus, or thighs

How can I be tested for HPV?

Visible warts are diagnosed by their appearance or through a PAP test – by examining cells from the cervix under a microscope.

- Women with HPV should have a regular PAP test every 12 months.
- Men with HPV should see their doctor every 6 to 12 months to make sure no warts have reappeared.

How is HPV treated?

For most people HPV goes away on its own without any treatment and does not cause any health problems. There is no cure for HPV. Genital warts can be treated by:

- Freezing (cryotherapy) – warts can be frozen off with liquid nitrogen
- Medication - special medications can be applied directly to the warts by the individual
- Laser therapy
- Repeated treatments may be needed and warts may come back.

What about partners?

When HPV is detected in one partner, the other partner should also be examined and have a PAP if needed.

Is follow-up important?

Both men and women who have HPV or have been in contact with HPV should examine themselves regularly for warts. It is very important for women with HPV to have regular PAP tests every 12 months.

Things to think about:

- Certain types of HPV may lead to cancer. A regular PAP test is a good way to reduce rates of cervical cancer.
- If you have warts, shaving your genital area can cause the virus to spread and more warts to appear.

How can I reduce my chances of getting and spreading HPV?

- Avoid sex
- Do not share sex toys
- Get the HPV vaccine
- Use a condom or dental dam every time you have sex
- Talk to your partner

Get tested:

- After your last partner, before every new partner
- After unprotected sex, injection drug use, snorting or crack pipes.

To help prevent STIs, get vaccinated against hepatitis A, B, and HPV.

References:

Canadian Federation for Sexual Health Retrieved from http://www.cfsh.ca/Your_Sexual_Health/STIs-and-HIV/

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada Retrieved from <http://www.sexualityandu.ca>

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