

Human Papillomavirus

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
- Abnormal cervical cells can be found during a PAP test

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?

Follow your health care provider's recommendations

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

To reduce your risk of STIs, 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.

For more information please contact The Clinic at 519-663-5446.

References

¹Canadian Federation for Sexual Health Retrieved from

http://www.cfsh.ca/Your_Sexual_Health/STIs-and-HIV/

²The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada Retrieved from

<http://www.sexualityandu.ca>

Last modified : July 2016