

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Fact Sheet

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- ❖ **What is HPV?**
- ❖ How **common** is HPV?
- ❖ How do people **get** HPV?
- ❖ What can HPV **cause**? What are the **symptoms**?
- ❖ **Testing/Diagnosis**
- ❖ **Treatment**
- ❖ What are the **complications** of bacterial vaginosis
- ❖ **Reduce** your risk
- ❖ HPV, **you, and your partner**

SOURCES:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- ❖ [Genital HPV Infection Fact Sheet](#)
- ❖ [Making Sense of Your HPV and Pap Test Results](#)
- ❖ [Sexually Transmitted Diseases Treatment Guidelines, 2010](#)

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

- ❖ [Human Papillomavirus \(HPV\) and Genital Warts](#)



What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus (or HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted disease (STD). HPV infection primarily affects the genital areas (genital HPV), including the anus, but genital HPV types can also infect the mouth and throat. Of the more than 40 sexually transmissible types of HPV, two (types 16 and 18) cause more than 70 percent of cervical cancers and two others (types 6 and 11) cause more than 90 percent of genital warts. It is possible to get more than one type of HPV. Risk can be reduced through HPV vaccination and the use of condoms.

How common is HPV?

HPV is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections in the world. In the United States (U.S.), at least 50 percent of sexually active people will get genital HPV.

There are about six million new onset cases of HPV in the U.S. each year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). While the majority (90%) of HPV infections clear on their own within two years, certain HPV infections may persist. At any one time, approximately 20 million Americans have a genital HPV infection.

How do people get HPV?

HPV is passed most often during vaginal or anal sex with someone who has this infection. HPV can also be transmitted through oral sex or by skin-to-skin genital contact. Most cases of HPV are spread by partners who don't have visible signs or symptoms and probably don't know they have the virus.

Very rarely, pregnant women with HPV can transmit the virus to their baby during delivery. When this happens, it can result in the baby developing warts in the airways (a condition known as recurrent respiratory Papillomatosis, or RRP). Due to the low likelihood of RRP in the newborn, pregnant women with HPV infection are routinely recommended to have their babies through a vaginal delivery rather than Caesarean section.



What can HPV cause? What are the symptoms?

Many people with genital HPV infection have no visible symptoms, and are never diagnosed.



Some types of HPV cause **genital or anal warts**. Warts appear as growths or bumps and may be raised or flat, single or multiple, small or large. They tend to be flesh-colored or whitish in appearance. Some even have a cauliflower appearance. They can appear on the vulva (the area outside the opening to the vagina), in the vagina, on the cervix, on the penis or scrotum, in or around the anus, and in the groin. The types of HPV that cause genital warts are different from those that cause cervical cancer.

Other types of HPV cause changes to a woman's cervix that can put her at risk for cervical cancer if undetected. These tiny "precancerous" cell changes cannot be seen with the naked eye, but can be found as part of a cervical cancer screening exam (see Testing/Diagnosis for more). These cell changes can, but usually do not, progress to cancer.

The types of HPV that can lead to cervical cancer are also associated with much rarer cancers of the vagina, vulva, penis, anus, and head and neck.

A person may have more than one HPV type.



Testing/Diagnosis

Healthcare providers usually diagnose warts by examining the genital area and looking closely at the skin. There is no specific test for warts.

Cervical cell changes are most often found as a result of cervical cytology screening also known as a Pap test, in which a healthcare provider takes a sample of cells from the cervix that are sent to a lab and examined under a microscope. HPV testing may also be done at the same time or as a follow-up to a Pap test (also called Pap smear). HPV testing determines if a woman has the types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer.

HPV tests are approved for use (along with a Pap test) for:

- ❖ Women age 21 and older who have inconclusive Pap test results
- ❖ Women ages 30 and older. (HPV tests are not approved for routine use with women in their 20s and younger because HPV infections in this age group are very common and tend to clear quickly on their own). In women 30 and older, HPV infections are less likely to clear on their own.



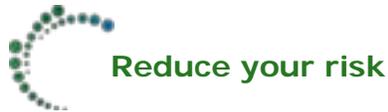
Treatment

Genital warts: There are several methods to treat warts. Some treatments are done in a clinic or doctor's office and might involve surgical removal or medication applied to the skin. Others are prescription creams that can be used at home. Warts sometimes clear on their own, so treatment is not always needed.



Note: Over-the-counter treatments for common warts should never be used with genital or anal warts.

Cervical cell changes: Treatment of cervical cell changes depends on the exact results of the Pap test (and HPV test, if one was done). Mild cell changes often clear naturally on their own, so healthcare providers often take a “wait and see” approach where a woman simply returns for frequent follow-up exams. When treatment is indicated, it typically involves an out-patient procedure to remove the abnormal cells.



Vaccines: There are two vaccines to protect against HPV, Cervarix and Gardasil. Both are effective at blocking infection with the HPV types most commonly cause cervical cancers (types 16 and 18). Both vaccines are approved to prevent cervical, vulvar, and vaginal cancers in females.

Both vaccines – which are given in three doses over six months- are recommended for girls ages 11-12. The vaccines can be given to girls as young as age nine. In order to receive the maximum benefit from HPV vaccination, all three doses must be completed before beginning sexually active. If the three-dose vaccination series is not initiated or completed by age 13, “catch up” vaccination for females ages 13-26 is recommended.

The vaccine does not provide protection against all types of HPV that cause cervical cancer. Vaccinated women will still need Pap smears to check for precancerous lesions on the cervix that may result from other HPV types that are not preventable by vaccination.

Note that most women who are diagnosed with cervical cancer tend to never have had a Pap test or have gone many years without one. Women should talk to their healthcare provider about how often they should be checked for cervical cancer.

To prevent genital warts in females, vaccination with Gardasil is recommended. Gardasil provides protection from the two HPV types that typically cause genital warts (types 6 and 11). As mentioned before, Gardasil also prevents HPV infection with the two HPV types that most commonly cause cervical cancers (types 16 and 18).

Gardasil may also be given to males age 9 through 26 years to reduce their likelihood of acquiring genital warts.

Condoms: Male latex condoms can reduce the risk of HPV transmission for the skin they cover. Since HPV can infect areas not covered by the condom, condoms can reduce, although not eliminate, the risk of getting HPV.



Use condoms or another latex barrier (such as a dental dam) for each sex act (oral, anal, and vaginal). A barrier should be put on before any sexual contact takes place.



HPV, you, and your partner

Keep in mind that HPV infections are extremely common – almost all sexually active people have HPV at some point.

HPV can be detected weeks, months or even years after someone contracts the virus. In most cases, it's impossible to tell how long someone has had the virus or when they contracted it.

All material contained in this fact sheet is free of copyright restrictions, and may be copied, reproduced, or duplicated without permission of the Office of Population Affairs in the Department of Health and Human Services. Citation of the source is appreciated.
This fact sheet was reviewed by: U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention | Content last reviewed: 5/31/12 | Content last updated: 10/19/2012



U.S. Department of Health & Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C.