

Genital HPV Infection - CDC Fact Sheet



Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. Some health effects caused by HPV can be prevented by the HPV vaccines.

What is HPV?

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI). HPV is a different virus than HIV and HSV (herpes). 79 million Americans, most in their late teens and early 20s, are infected with HPV. There are many different types of HPV. Some types can cause health problems including genital warts and cancers. But there is a vaccine that can stop these health problems from happening.

How is HPV spread?

You can get HPV by having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has the virus. It is most commonly spread during vaginal or anal sex. HPV can be passed even when an infected person has no signs or symptoms.

Anyone who is sexually active can get HPV, even if you have had sex with only one person. You also can develop symptoms years after you have sex with someone who is infected. This makes it hard to know when you first became infected.

Does HPV cause health problems?

In most cases, HPV goes away on its own and does not cause any health problems. But when HPV does not go away, it can cause health problems like genital warts and cancer.

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. A healthcare provider can usually diagnose warts by looking at the genital area.

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, including the base of the tongue and tonsils (called oropharyngeal cancer).

Cancer often takes years, even decades, to develop after a person gets HPV. The types of HPV that can cause genital warts are not the same as the types of HPV that can cause cancers.

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

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

You can do several things to lower your chances of getting HPV.

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. (See “Who should get vaccinated?” below) CDC recommends HPV vaccination at age 11 or 12 years (or can start at age 9 years) and for everyone through age 26 years, if not vaccinated already. For more information on the recommendations, please see: <https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/hpv/public/index.html>

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 latex condoms the right way every time you have sex. This can lower your chances of getting HPV. But HPV can infect areas not covered by a condom - 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.

Who should get vaccinated?

HPV vaccination is recommended at age 11 or 12 years (or can start at age 9 years) and for everyone through age 26 years, if not vaccinated already.

Vaccination is not recommended for everyone older than age 26 years. However, some adults age 27 through 45 years who are not already vaccinated may decide to get the HPV vaccine after speaking with their healthcare provider about their risk for new HPV infections and the possible benefits of vaccination. HPV vaccination in this age range provides less benefit. Most sexually active adults have already been exposed to HPV, although not necessarily all of the HPV types targeted by vaccination.

At any age, having a new sex partner is a risk factor for getting a new HPV infection. People who are already in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship are not likely to get a new HPV infection.

How do I 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 be used to screen for cervical cancer. These tests are only recommended for screening in 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 are infected and 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.

How common is HPV and the health problems caused by HPV?

HPV (the virus): About 79 million Americans are currently infected with HPV. About 14 million people become newly infected each year. HPV is so common that almost every person who is sexually-active will get HPV at some time in their life if they don’t get the HPV vaccine.

Health problems related to HPV include genital warts and cervical cancer.

Genital warts: Before HPV vaccines were introduced, roughly 340,000 to 360,000 women and men were affected by genital warts caused by HPV every year.* Also, about one in 100 sexually active adults in the U.S. has genital warts at any given time.

Cervical cancer: Every year, nearly 12,000 women living in the U.S. will be diagnosed with cervical cancer, and more than 4,000 women die from cervical cancer—even with screening and treatment.

There are other conditions and cancers caused by HPV that occur in people living in the United States. Every year, approximately 19,400 women and 12,100 men are affected by cancers caused by HPV.

*These figures only look at the number of people who sought care for genital warts. This could be an underestimate of the actual number of people who get genital warts.

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

If you are pregnant and have HPV, you can get genital warts or develop abnormal cell changes on your cervix. Abnormal cell changes can be found with routine cervical cancer screening. You should get routine cervical cancer screening even when you are pregnant.

Can I be treated for HPV or health problems caused by 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 be treated by your healthcare provider or with prescription medication. If left untreated, genital warts may go away, stay the same, or grow in size or number.
2. **Cervical precancer** can be treated. Women who get routine Pap tests and follow up as needed can identify problems before cancer develops. Prevention is always better than treatment. For more information visit www.cancer.org.
3. **Other HPV-related cancers** are also more treatable when diagnosed and treated early. For more information visit www.cancer.org

Where can I get more information?

HPV Topic Page
www.cdc.gov/hpv/index.html

HPV Vaccination
www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd/hpv/index.html

Cancer Prevention and Control
www.cdc.gov/cancer/

Cervical Cancer – What Should I Know About Screening?
www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic_info/screening.htm

CDC's National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program
www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccedp/

Division of STD Prevention (DSTDP)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
www.cdc.gov/std

CDC-INFO Contact Center
1-800-CDC-INFO
(1-800-232-4636)
www.cdc.gov/dcs/ContactUs/Form

CDC National Prevention Information Network (NPIN)
npin.cdc.gov/disease/stds
P.O. Box 6003
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