

HUMAN PAPILLOMA VIRUS (HPV)

What is HPV?

- HPV is the name of a group of viruses that includes more than 70 different types.
- HPV is the most common viral STD in the United States. It is estimated that up to half of all sexually active young women are infected with the virus that causes HPV.
- Certain types of HPV cause visible warts on the genitals. Some types of HPV infection cause no visible warts and many people with HPV don't know they have it.
- HPV is usually spread by direct skin-to-skin contact during vaginal, anal and/or oral sex with someone who has this infection.
- HPV is the number one cause of abnormal Pap smear results in women and may lead to pre-cancerous changes on the cervix. HPV is the primary cause of cervical cancer.
- Both men and women can contract and spread HPV.

What are the Signs and Symptoms of HPV?

- Most women and men with HPV have no symptoms and don't know they have it.
- Warts may appear within several weeks after sexual relations with an infected person; or they may take months to appear; or they may never appear. This makes it hard to know exactly when or from whom you got the virus.
- If you are infected with visible genital warts they may appear to be unusual growths, bumps, or skin changes on or near the penis, inside the vagina, on the cervix, vulva, perineum, urethra or anus. You may even notice unusual itching, pain or bleeding in the genital area.

How do I get tested for HPV?

- Regular genital self-examinations may be helpful in detecting visible genital warts for both women and men. If you detect unusual changes in your genital area the only way to know for sure if you have HPV is to go to a health care provider and get a physical exam.
- To check for visible warts a health care provider will examine your genital area more closely and may use a magnifying lens to find small warts. This causes abnormal tissue to turn white and makes it easier to see, especially if it is viewed through a magnifying lens such as a colposcope.
- To check for subclinical HPV (HPV that has no symptoms) a Pap smear is taken during a pelvic exam. For women, an abnormal Pap smear may be the first sign that HPV is present. Women with abnormal Pap smears should be examined further for cervical problems or followed closely by a doctor.

- There are several new tests that can detect the genetic material of HPV. These can be used to find cervical HPV infection in a small number of cases.
- Men with genital warts or who have a partner with HPV should talk to their health care provider.

What is the Treatment for HPV?

- HPV is a persistent condition even when there are no symptoms. No therapy has been shown to get rid of the virus. In 80% of cases HPV recurs.
- Since it is difficult to cure HPV the goal of treatment is the temporary removal of visible genital warts and the lessening of symptoms and signs, not to cure HPV.
- Even if there are no visible warts from HPV, it is important that health care providers watch carefully for precancerous changes (by taking a Pap smear) on the cervix that may be found along with HPV infection.
- The currently available treatments for visible genital warts consists of two types: (1) patient-applied therapies and (2) provider-administered therapies.
- Whatever treatment you choose remember to always ask your health care provider for a complete explanation of the treatment including its costs, benefits and required follow-up care.
- In June 2006, the HPV vaccine was approved by the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for women between the ages of 9-26. The vaccine was created to prevent 4 of the most common types of HPV viruses from infecting a woman's body. 2 of these viruses cause 70 percent of cervical cancer. This vaccine also prevents 2 types of HPV viruses that cause 90 percent of genital warts. It will not help treat or cure men or women who are already infected with HPV, and it will not prevent the spread of other types of HPV. The best time for women to get the vaccine is during puberty and before any sexual contact. For more information on the HPV vaccine, click [here](#).

REMINDER: Using a condom consistently can help to protect you from STDs. Make sure that you get checked for STDs every time you have a health exam. Women should get a Pap smear at least once a year.

For more information about HPV visit:

[The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)

[Planned Parenthood](#)