

Human Papillomavirus – HPV – Fact Sheet

What is HPV?

Genital human papillomavirus (also called HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI). There are more than 40 types of HPV that can infect the genital areas of males and females. These HPV types can also infect the mouth and throat

What are the potential health problems caused by HPV?

In most cases HPV goes away by itself before it causes any health problems, and most people who become infected with HPV do not even know they have it. However, when the virus persists, or does not go away, HPV can cause normal cells to become abnormal and, most of the time you cannot see or feel these cell changes.

How common are HPV infection and associated diseases?

HPV (the virus): Approximately 79 million Americans are currently infected with HPV. About 14 million people become newly infected each year. HPV is so common that nearly all sexually-active men and women will get at least one type of HPV at some point in their lives.

Genital warts: About 360,000 persons in the U.S. get genital warts each year.

Cervical cancer: About 10,300 women in the U.S. get cervical cancer each year.

Other cancers that can be caused by HPV, including some vaginal, vulvar, penile, anal, and oropharyngeal cancers: Each year in the U.S., HPV is thought to cause an estimated

- 2,100 vulvar cancers,
- 500 vaginal cancers,
- 600 penile cancers,
- 2,800 anal cancers in women,
- 1,500 anal cancers in men,
- 1,700 oropharyngeal cancers in women,*
- 6,700 oropharyngeal cancers in men.*

*Note: Other factors, notably tobacco and alcohol use, may also play a role with HPV to cause these cancers.

About 21,000 of these cancers are potentially preventable by HPV vaccines.

Who is at risk of acquiring HPV?

Anyone who is having (or has ever had) sex can get HPV. HPV is so common that nearly all sexually-active men and women get it at some point in their lives. This is true even for people who only have sex with one person in their lifetime.

How can HPV be prevented?

- HPV vaccines are recommended for 11- or 12-year-old boys and girls.
 - HPV vaccines are safe and effective,
 - The vaccine protects against the four most common high-risk types of HPV. Two types (6,11) cause 90% of genital warts and two types (16,18) cause 70% of cervical pre-cancer and cancer cases.

- HPV vaccines are given in three shots over six months; it is important to get all three doses to get the best protection.
- Boys and girls at ages 11 or 12 are most likely to have the best protection provided by HPV vaccines. Receiving the vaccine before they are sexually active achieves a full immune response to protect them from HPV exposure in later years.
- For those who choose to be sexually active, condoms may lower the risk of HPV. To be most effective, condoms should be used with every sex act, from start to finish. HPV can infect areas that are not covered by a condom - so condoms may not fully protect against HPV.
- People can also lower their chances of getting HPV by being in a faithful relationship with one partner, limiting their number of sex partners, and choosing a partner who has had no or few prior sex partners. But even people with only one lifetime sex partner can get HPV, and it may not be possible to determine if a person who has been sexually active in the past is currently infected. Because HPV is so common, and almost every sexually-active person will get HPV at some time in their lives, it is important to protect against the possible health effects of HPV.

In addition to receiving the HPV vaccination series, women aged 21 and over need routine cervical cancer screening (Pap test) to detect abnormalities that may result from HPV or other infections not covered by the vaccine. Cervical cancer is most treatable when it is diagnosed and treated early. Women who get routine Pap tests and follow up as needed can identify problems before cancer develops.

What vaccines are available?

For girls and women: Two vaccines (Cervarix and Gardasil) are available to protect females against the types of HPV that cause most cervical cancers. One of these vaccines (Gardasil) also protects against most genital warts, and has been shown to protect against anal, vaginal, and vulvar cancers. Either vaccine is recommended for 11- and 12-year-old girls, and for females 13 through 26 years of age who did not get any or all of the shots when they were younger. These vaccines can also be given to girls beginning at 9 years of age.

For boys and men: One vaccine (Gardasil) is available to protect males against most genital warts and anal cancers. Gardasil is recommended for 11- and 12-year-old boys, and for males 13 through 21 years of age who did not get any or all of the shots when they were younger. Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men should receive the vaccine through age 26 years. Males 22–26 years of age may also get the vaccine.

Why an HPV initiative now?

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Director Dr. Tom Frieden has identified HPV as an urgent health threat that can be effectively addressed in 2014:

“HPV is a cancer virus. The HPV vaccine can protect the next generation against deadly cancers.” HPV vaccination rates, already low but increasing steadily each year through 2010, leveled off in 2011 – 2012. By raising awareness, providing accurate information and public education, and addressing obstacles to vaccine access, a reversal of low vaccination rates can be achieved.

For more information:

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <http://www.cdc.gov/hpv>
- American Cancer Society, <http://www.cancer.org/cancer/humanpapillomavirus>
- National Cancer Institute, <http://www.cancer.gov/topics/risk/hpv>
- American Sexual Health Association, <http://www.ashasexualhealth.org>