

Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the world. You will likely get some type of HPV in your life and not have any symptoms. Most people have no problems at all from the virus.

Some strains of HPV can cause genital warts and cancer. There are over 100 different types of HPV. About 40 types can be spread through sexual contact. Most types of HPV are harmless, cause no symptoms, and go away without treatment.

How do I get HPV?

If you have any type of sexual contact (oral, vaginal, or anal), you're at risk for HPV. It can be spread through intimate skin-to-skin contact with a person who has HPV. HPV can be spread even if there are no symptoms or you can't see any warts.

How do I know I have HPV?

Many people with HPV don't have symptoms. Genital warts may be the only sign that someone has HPV. Genital or anal warts may look like tiny bumps or clustered growths on the skin (often a cauliflower-like texture). Most HPV infections go away on their own within 2 to 3 years.

There is no routine test for HPV. You need to see a doctor or nurse to be diagnosed with genital warts.

Is HPV harmful?

Some types of HPV are linked to cervical cancer, other genital cancers, and cancer of the penis, anus, mouth, and throat. Some types of HPV cause genital warts, but most warts aren't harmful.

How are genital warts treated?

Genital warts can be treated by some doctors and in STI clinics with freezing (liquid nitrogen). You may need more than 1 treatment.

Other treatments include prescription creams or liquids that you or your doctor put on. Talk to a nurse or doctor to see which treatment is right for you.

Don't:

- scratch or shave the affected area as it can cause the virus to spread
- use over-the-counter wart treatments for genital warts

How can I prevent spreading HPV?

Tell your partner(s) that you have genital warts so you can make choices to lower the risk of spreading the virus.

Using a condom is good protection against STIs. But, condoms don't cover all the skin around the genitals. This means you aren't completely protected from HPV even if you use a condom.

HPV and Pap Tests

There is a link between HPV and cervical cancer, so regular Pap tests are important. A Pap test is when a doctor checks a female's cervix and takes a tissue sample. If there are abnormal cells on the cervix, this may lead to cervical cancer. Regular follow-up is needed.

HPV Vaccine

You can get vaccinated to protect yourself from certain types of HPV. Vaccination is approved in Canada for females and males. Talk to your nurse or doctor if you're interested.

For More Information

- STI/HIV Information Line: 1-800-772-2437
- www.myhealth.alberta.ca
- www.sexgerms.com



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