

HPV: Frequently Asked Questions

Quick Facts:

- Over 80% of people who have ever had sexual contact will have a human papillomavirus (HPV) infection during their lifetime.
- Nearly half of women get an HPV infection from their first sex partner.
- 90% of HPV infections go away on their own.
- Very few people who have HPV get cancer.

HPV

What is HPV?

HPV:

- is a common sexually transmitted virus.
- can cause genital warts.
- usually has no signs or symptoms.
- can cause abnormal cell changes which can lead to cervical cancer.
- can cause cancer of the vagina, vulva, penis, anus, mouth and throat.
- often goes away on its own. Only a small number of HPV infections turn into cancer.

Is HPV the only cause of cervical cancer?

HPV is the cause of cervical cancer in 99.7% of cases.

How did I get HPV?

HPV passes from person to person through current or past sexual contact (including sexual abuse).

Sexual contact includes:

- oral, genital, and/or rectal skin to skin contact, or
- sex with sex toys.

HPV can pass to and from people of all genders.

Do condoms protect against HPV?

Condoms can provide some protection against HPV and other sexually transmitted infections. However, because HPV is easily spread via skin-to-skin contact, condoms cannot guarantee complete protection from HPV.

I'm pregnant. Will I give HPV to my baby?

It is rare for a pregnant woman to pass HPV to her baby. HPV is more likely to pass to a baby if a woman has an outbreak of genital warts at the time of vaginal birth.

Will having HPV affect my chance of getting pregnant?

Having HPV will not affect your chances of getting pregnant.

Does HPV affect people in certain age groups?

While HPV is more common in younger people, HPV can affect men and women at any age. HPV can stay in the body for many years and not cause problems.

I have had genital warts. Does this mean I will get cervical cancer?

Not necessarily. The types of HPV that cause genital warts are not the same types of HPV that cause cervical cancer. It is possible to have more than one type of HPV at a time, including HPV that causes genital warts and HPV that causes cervical cancer.

RESULTS AND TREATMENT

Does my abnormal Pap test result mean that I have HPV?

An abnormal Pap test result means that abnormal cell changes caused by HPV were found on your cervix. It is likely that you have had an HPV infection. It does not mean you have cervical cancer or will get cervical cancer. However, more testing is required to see if you need treatment.

How does HPV get treated?

Genital warts and abnormal cell changes can be removed, but the HPV virus cannot be cured. Genital warts can be treated by a healthcare provider using:

- chemicals,
- laser surgery,
- liquid nitrogen, or
- a cream that boosts the body's ability to fight against the HPV virus.

Abnormal cervical cells can be treated in colposcopy with:

- cryosurgery,
- laser surgery, or
- LEEP (loop electrosurgical excision procedure).

How do I know the treatment will get all of the HPV?

You won't know. HPV can lie dormant (or hide) and cause abnormal changes later in life. After being released from colposcopy, continue with regular cervical cancer screening.

PARTNERS

How do I know who gave me HPV?

You cannot know who gave you HPV. With each new sexual contact, there is a risk of getting HPV. Most people who have ever had sexual contact will have HPV at some point.

I've only had sex with females. How did I get HPV?

HPV can spread between any two people. It does not matter if you have a male or female partner.

I have been with the same partner for many years. How did I get HPV?

There is no way to know when you got HPV or who gave it to you. A person can have HPV for many years and not show abnormal changes until later in life. You or your partner may have HPV from a previous partner, and that infection may only now be "active". Having HPV does not mean that you or your partner have had other recent partners.

What do I tell my partner? Do I need to tell my partner?

Talking to your partner about your HPV infection is an individual decision. HPV is often a normal part of being sexually active. It is likely that your partner has also had HPV, but is not aware. Having HPV does not mean that you or your partner is having sexual contact outside of your relationship. A person can have HPV for many years before it causes problems.

Should my partner get tested? Treated?

There is no HPV test for males. Most HPV infections go away on their own. Pap tests are recommended every three years for most women age 21-69. Pap tests can find abnormal cells on the cervix caused by HPV.

Once I am treated, how do I know I won't get another HPV infection?

You don't. It is possible that a current infection may cause abnormal changes later in life. It is also possible that you may get a new HPV infection if you are exposed to HPV. HPV infections are common with sexual activity. Most HPV infections go away on their own.

Should I get a Pap test every time I have a new partner?

No. Most HPV infections go away on their own. When HPV does not go away, it usually takes 10-20 years to grow into cervical cancer. Screening with the Pap test every three years gives the body time to clear an HPV infection. It also allows abnormal changes on the cervix to be found before they turn into cancer.

Can I get tested for HPV?

HPV testing is not funded in Manitoba.

HPV VACCINE

Should I get the vaccine now that I know I have had HPV?

People who have already been exposed to HPV may still benefit from receiving the HPV vaccine because it is unlikely that they have been exposed to all types of HPV covered in the vaccine. Getting the HPV vaccine is a personal decision. Make an appointment with your healthcare provider to talk about what is right for you.

If I've had the HPV vaccine, do I still need regular screening?

The HPV vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV that can cause cervical cancer. Even if you have had the HPV vaccine, it is important to continue with regular cervical cancer screening.

Did you know?

You can request your Pap test results from CervixCheck online at: GetCheckedManitoba.ca/cervix-sendresults.html