

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Infection and Vaccine: What You Need To Know

Human Papillomavirus

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the name of a group of viruses that includes more than 100 different types. More than 30 of those are sexually transmitted.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, all sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives.

Once the virus (germ) infects a cell in the genital area of men and women, it copies itself and keeps infecting healthy cells. When the dead cells shed, you may pass the virus to someone else.

HPV can cause:

- cervical and vaginal cancer in women
- penile cancer in men
- anal cancer, throat cancer and genital warts in both men and women.

Symptoms

Most people who have HPV do not have any symptoms and do not know they are infected. The virus may be passed on to others without knowing it and even without symptoms.

Some people may get genital warts. These are single or multiple bumps that are found in the genital area. They can also be shaped like cauliflower.

How HPV Is Spread

HPV infections are spread by:

- vaginal, oral or anal sex
- contact with another person's genital warts.

A pregnant woman can pass HPV to her baby during vaginal delivery, but this is rare.

Testing Schedule

For women, the infection can be found during a routine Pap test. A Pap test finds cell changes in the cervix. It can find cervical cancer early when it is easier to treat and cure.

For men, there is no screening test at this time.

If you do not have signs or symptoms of a cervical problem, and you have no history of abnormal Pap test results, your health care provider will recommend the following Pap testing schedule:

- Ages 21 to 29:
 - have a Pap test every 3 years
 - or
 - have an HPV test every 5 years starting at age 25 (if your doctor advises)
- Ages 30 or older:
 - have a Pap test every 3 years
 - or
 - have an HPV test every 5 years
 - or
 - have a Pap test and HPV test every 5 years

(over)

- Ages 65 or older: You can stop having Pap tests if you had:
 - regular Pap tests until age 65
 - or**
 - 3 normal Pap tests in a row
 - or**
 - 2 normal combination screens (Pap and HPV) over the last 10 years. The most recent test has to be within 5 years.

If you have signs or symptoms of a cervical problem or are at a higher risk for cervical changes, your health care provider may suggest a different schedule. You might also get a Pap test for other reasons such as heavy vaginal bleeding.

Men with risk factors for anal HPV can be tested.

How to Treat HPV

There is no treatment to make HPV go away. Most of the time, your immune system fights off the virus to make it go away on its own.

If HPV causes genital warts or dysplasia (abnormal cells in the cervix) these both can be treated.

Talk to your health care provider about the best treatment for you.

How To Keep From Getting HPV

The best way to prevent HPV is to get vaccinated. The HPV vaccine is safe and it works. Another way to protect against getting HPV is to not have any genital contact with another infected person.

If you choose to be sexually active, be involved in a long-term relationship with one partner who is not infected to help prevent HPV infections.

If you choose to be sexually active and not in a long-term relationship:

- Limit your sexual partners.
- Find out if your partner has ever had a sexually transmitted disease (STD).

- Use latex condoms when having any kind of sexual contact.
 - Condoms can reduce the risk of spreading HPV.
 - Men and women can get HPV from genital areas that are not covered by a latex condom.
 - It is also possible to get HPV from genital areas that are covered by a condom.
 - Using condoms has been shown to lower the rate of getting cervical cancer and help protect you from other STDs.

HPV Vaccine

The HPV vaccine can prevent most of the cancers caused by HPV if it is given before exposure to the virus. **The HPV vaccine is recommended for boys and girls at age 11 or 12.**

The vaccine is an injection (shot). It may be given as early as age 9 or as late as age 45. Most people older than age 26 will not benefit from the HPV vaccine.

Children

The vaccine is given in 2 doses. Most children receive the first dose from ages 9 to 15. The second shot is given 6 to 12 months after the first shot.

Teens and adults

Anyone who gets the first dose of the HPV vaccine at age 15 or older will need 3 doses of the vaccine. The second dose is given 1 to 2 months after the first dose. The third dose is given 6 months after the first dose.

The HPV vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines.

Talk with your health care provider for more information.

Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

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