

What is human papillomavirus?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) infection is a common sexually transmitted disease caused by the human papillomavirus. HPV is the name of a group that includes more than 100 different types of viruses. More than 30 of these viruses are sexually transmitted and can infect the genital area of men and women.

Who is at risk for genital HPV?

Since genital HPV is primarily spread through genital contact, any person engaging in sexual contact with another individual can be infected with HPV. The greater the number of sex partners, the greater the risk of infection.

What are the symptoms of genital HPV?

Most people who are infected with genital HPV do not know they are infected because there are no signs or symptoms. If symptoms do occur, they may include visible genital warts or pre-cancerous changes in the cervix, vulva, vagina, anus or penis. Genital HPV infection rarely results in anal, genital, and oral cancers (back of throat, base of tongue, and tonsils).

How soon do symptoms appear?

The time from exposure to the development of symptoms is unknown but is estimated to range from three months to several years.

How is genital HPV spread?

Genital HPV is spread through genital contact. A pregnant woman can pass HPV to her baby during vaginal delivery, although this is rare.

When and for how long is a person able to spread the disease?

It is unknown how long a person is able to spread HPV. Since most HPV infections have no signs or symptoms, most infected people are unaware they are infected, yet they can transmit the virus to a sex partner.

How is HPV diagnosed?

Most women are diagnosed with genital HPV on the basis of an abnormal Pap test. A laboratory test also is available to diagnose genital HPV in women. No HPV tests are available for men.

What is the treatment?

There is no cure for genital HPV infection, although in most people the infection goes away on its own. The treatments provided are directed to the changes in the skin or mucous membranes caused by HPV infection, such as warts and pre-cancerous changes in the cervix.

Does past infection make a person immune?

For most people who become infected with genital HPV, the infection will clear on its own. Once a person has been exposed to a specific type of HPV, they cannot be reinfected with the same type again, but can be infected with other types of the virus.

Should adolescents or others be excluded from school, work or other activities if they have genital HPV?

No. Since genital HPV is transmitted through sexual contact, exclusion is not necessary.

What can be done to prevent genital HPV?

- **GET VACCINATED**
 - There is one HPV vaccine available in the U.S., Gardasil 9[®]. It protects against nine strains of HPV, including strains that cause approximately 90 percent of all cervical cancers. Gardasil 9[®] also prevents most genital warts and other HPV- associated cancers.
 - HPV vaccine is routinely recommended for everyone 11 to 12 years old. Additionally, catch-up vaccination is recommended for all persons through age 26 years who are not adequately vaccinated. Ideally, the vaccine should be given prior to having any sexual contact before you are exposed to HPV. The vaccine is designed to offer lifelong protection against HPV but is not meant to encourage sexual activity. Individuals ages 27-45 who have not been vaccinated can also be vaccinated.
- Practice Abstinence.
- Use condoms or other latex barriers for oral, anal and penile-vaginal sex to reduce the risk of getting or passing HPV (condoms do not provide complete protection against HPV).
- Get regular pap tests to detect HPV lesions and treat them before they become cancerous (girls and women).
- Get yearly annual pap smears if considered high risk.

Additional Information:

Additional information is available at www.ndhealth.gov/disease or by calling the North Dakota Department of Health at 800.472.2180.

Resources:

American Academy of Pediatrics. [Human Papillomaviruses]. In: Kimberlin DW, Brady MT, Jackson MA, Long SS, eds. *Red Book: 2018-2021 Report of the Committee on Infectious Diseases*. 31st ed. Itasca, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics; 2018-2021: 582-590.

Meites E, Szilagyi PG, Chesson HW, Unger ER, Romero JR, Markowitz LE. Human Papillomavirus Vaccination for Adults: Updated Recommendations of the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices. *MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep* 2019;68:698–702. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm6832a3>.