

HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV) & HPV VACCINE

What is it & how did I get it?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a very common sexually transmitted infection (STI) that approximately 75% of sexually active males & females will get at some point in their lives. Most people with HPV do not develop symptoms & can pass along the virus without knowing it. There are more than 140 types of HPV; about 40 of these are sexually transmitted causing genital HPV infections. Genital HPV is spread by direct skin to skin contact, usually during oral, vaginal or anal sex (not through exchange of bodily fluids). Some of these types can cause cervical cancer if the infections are not found & left untreated for years. Other types can cause genital warts but rarely cause cancer.

What can happen if I have HPV?

HPV infection is different for each person. Once you are exposed to HPV, you could:

1. Not have any symptoms at all - The virus can still be spread to others during skin to skin contact. The body's immune system usually works to clear the virus naturally within 2 years.
2. Develop Warts - The virus may eventually "show" itself as warts in the genital area or by cellular changes (abnormal cells showing on a Pap test). Warts are diagnosed by their "bumpy" appearance & can be alone or in a cluster. Warts can be small, large, raised or flat & can be painless or itchy & uncomfortable. Warts can appear shortly after exposure with an infected person or can take months/years to show. For women, warts can be anywhere in the anal or genital area, thighs, inside the vagina &/or on the cervix. For men, warts can be anywhere in the anal or genital area, thighs &/or inside the urethra (tube that carries urine). If left untreated, warts may go away, remain unchanged or change in number & size.
3. Have precancerous or cancerous changes - These changes happen in men & women if they have one of the high risk strains of HPV (Type 16 or 18). HPV can cause cancers of the anus, cervix, penis, vagina &/or vulva. Recent studies have linked HPV to throat & mouth cancers.

Women: The cervix is the most common place to see cancerous changes. Cervical cancer usually does not have symptoms until the cancer is advanced. This is why it is important for all women to have regular Pap tests. Pre-cancerous changes (abnormal cells) will show on

Pap tests long before cancer is seen. These changes can be treated & cancer can be prevented. If a woman continues to have abnormal Pap tests, a referral may be made to a specialist. For women over 30 years of age, DNA testing is available through some private labs & can be ordered by a family doctor. DNA testing is not covered by your Ontario health card & cost about \$90.

Men: Any changes of the skin in the genital area should be visually examined by a doctor. It will then be determined if other testing is recommended.

Treatment

Warts that are seen can be removed by freezing (liquid nitrogen) or other medications. **Treatment removes only the wart, not the virus.** More than one treatment is often needed. If there are many warts, a specialist's referral may be needed for laser treatment or surgical removal.

Prevention

Any person who is sexually active can come in contact with HPV. Some ways to reduce the risk of getting HPV are:

- ✓ Vaccinating - A vaccine is available for both males & females (see other side).
- ✓ Delaying sex until your late teens & limiting your number of sexual partners.
- ✓ Practicing "safer sex" - Always using condoms/dams for all sex acts to help prevent the spread of HPV, HIV & other STIs. Condoms cannot fully prevent the spread of HPV as they do not cover all the areas of the skin that could be affected.
- ✓ Taking care of yourself - eating well, exercising regularly, managing stress & getting enough rest to help keep your immune system healthy.
- ✓ Avoiding tobacco smoke - smoking & second hand smoke may cause HPV to become cancerous.
- ✓ Testing regularly for STIs & getting treatment if you have an infection.
- ✓ Having regular Pap tests and checkups.

What about sexual partners?

If you have HPV, all sexual partners should be examined. HPV is very contagious & can spread even when no warts are seen.

Pregnancy

Women who have had genital warts in the past will not likely have any problems during a pregnancy or birth. If you have warts during pregnancy, they can grow in size &

number or bleed due to hormonal changes. This could make a vaginal delivery more difficult. Although rare,

HPV can cause growths in the throats of infants exposed to the virus during childbirth. Please turn over →

HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS VACCINE (HPV)

What is the Human Papillomavirus Vaccine?

HPV vaccine can provide protection against four types of HPV- types 6, 11, 16 & 18. In Canada, low-risk types 6 & 11 cause about 90% of genital warts & high risk types 16 & 18 cause 70% of cervical cancer.

The vaccine does not contain any preservatives, antibiotics or live virus & it will not cause you to become infected with HPV. Three doses of the vaccine are required for protection.

Who should get the HPV vaccine?

HPV vaccines have been approved for males aged 9-26 years & females aged 9 to 26 years. It is most effective if given before you become sexually active. If you already have HPV, the vaccine can still provide protection against the other types.

Who should NOT get the HPV vaccine?

You should not get the HPV vaccine if you:

- have already been fully vaccinated with the HPV vaccine
- have had a serious reaction to a previous dose of the HPV vaccine
- have a yeast allergy or an allergy to something in the vaccine
- are pregnant
- have a fever or anything more serious than a minor cold

Is the HPV vaccine safe?

HPV vaccines are safe. Side effects may include redness, tenderness & swelling at the injection site. Less common side effects may include fever, nausea, dizziness & headache. *Rare* reactions include trouble breathing, swelling of the face or mouth, a fever over 39 degrees C, hives or a rash. If you develop any of these rare reactions, get immediate medical attention.

Do females who are vaccinated still need to have Pap tests to screen for cervical cancer?

Yes. It is still important to have regular Pap tests. HPV vaccine only protects against the most common types that can cause genital warts & cervical cancer. It is still possible for women who have been vaccinated to be infected with one of the less common types. Getting vaccinated & regular Pap testing is the best protection against cervical cancer.

Where can I get the vaccine?

Currently in Ontario, the HPV vaccine is free to all girls in Grade 8-12. If you would like the vaccine - see your family physician, local walk-in clinic or ask the university/college health centre where you attend. You will need to pay for the vaccine, so check with your drug plan as some insurance companies may cover some cost.

Where can I learn more about HPV & the HPV vaccine?

- American Social Health Association (ASHA)
www.ashastd.org
- Ministry of Health & Long Term Care
<http://www.hpvontario.ca/>
- Public Health Agency of Canada
<http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/std-mts/hpv-vph/fact-faits-eng.php>
- Cancer Care Ontario
www.cancercare.on.ca/pcs/screening/cervscreening/hpvfaq
- Society of Obstetricians & Gynecologists of Canada
<http://www.hpvinfo.ca/hpvinfo/home.aspx>

Remember:

Condom use will help prevent the spread of sexually transmitted infections, including hepatitis B & HIV

**For more information call Peel Public Health 905-799-7700
& ask for Sexual Health Information**

or visit

peelsexualhealth.ca

peelregion.ca/health

intheknowpeel.ca