

TEN THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT HPV



HPV IS COMMON

Most sexually active individuals have HPV at some point. At any time there are approximately 79 million people in the U.S. with HPV.

DIFFERENT TYPES

Some types of HPV can cause genital warts while some other, different types are linked to cervical cell changes that, if not detected early, can increase a woman's risk for cervical cancer. HPV also causes some cancers of the penis, anus, vagina, vulva, and throat. HPV infections are usually harmless, though, and most are cleared naturally by the body in a year or two.

TREATMENT

There's no treatment for the virus itself, but health care providers have plenty of options to treat diseases caused by HPV. Warts and cervical cell changes can be removed with outpatient procedures in a clinic, for instance. Prescription creams and solutions that patients use at home can also treat warts (but never use over-the-counter wart remedies in the anal/genital area).

RELATIONSHIPS

It can take weeks, months, or even years after exposure to HPV before symptoms develop or the virus is detected. This is why it is usually impossible to determine when or from whom HPV may have been contracted. A recent diagnosis of HPV does not necessarily mean anyone has been unfaithful, even in a long-term relationship spanning years.

PREGNANCY

Pregnant women with HPV almost always have natural deliveries and healthy babies – it's very rare for a newborn to get HPV from the mother. Delivery by C-section is not recommended unless warts are present and blocking the birth canal when the mother goes into labor.

TRANSMISSION

HPV is usually passed by genital to genital and genital to anal contact (even without penetration). The virus can also be transmitted by oral to genital contact, although this probably occurs less often. Studies show that male condoms can reduce HPV transmission to females, although condoms only protect the skin they cover.

VACCINES

HPV vaccination can help prevent infection from both high risk HPV types that can lead to cervical cancer and low risk types that cause genital warts. The CDC recommends all boys and girls get HPV vaccine at age 11 or 12. The vaccine produces a stronger immune response when taken during the preteen years. For this reason, up until age 14, only two doses are the vaccine are required. Young women and men can get the vaccine up to age 26, but for those 15 and older, a full three-dose series is needed..

SCREENING

At age 21, women should begin screening for cervical cancer with a Pap test. A Pap test doesn't look for HPV, but can find cell changes to the cervix caused by the virus. Starting at age 30, women can also be screened with an HPV test. HPV tests find the virus and help healthcare providers know which women are at highest risk for cervical cancer. The latest recommendations for women 30-65 include either Pap testing every three years, Pap and HPV co-testing every five years, or HPV testing alone every five years.

THE EMOTIONAL SIDE

It can be upsetting when HPV is first diagnosed, but remember that having HPV is normal! It doesn't mean that anyone did something wrong, just that like most others they were exposed to a common infection. There are 14 million new HPV infections in the U.S. each year alone!

FINDING SUPPORT

The American Sexual Health Association and the National Cervical Cancer Coalition have online support communities at Inspire.com that connect patients, partners, and caregivers. These are safe places where thousands of users find the information and support they need.

