



WHAT IS HPV? Human Papilloma Virus

What is HPV?

- ❑ HPV is very common; many people do not even know they have the virus.
- ❑ HPV is a group of viruses. There are many different types of HPV. The type determines which part of the body will be affected.
- ❑ HPV can be found around the genital organs.
- ❑ Some types can cause abnormal cell changes on the cervix.
- ❑ Some types can cause warts on the genital area.

HPV and the abnormal Pap test?

- ❑ Having an abnormal Pap test does not mean you have cancer of the cervix.
- ❑ Most women who have been exposed to HPV do not develop cancer of the cervix.
- ❑ For most women strong body defenses (immune system) fight off viruses, including HPV.
- ❑ The HPV infection usually goes away by itself and the Pap test is normal again.
- ❑ Some women may have trouble fighting the virus. This can cause changes to cells of the cervix that may slowly develop into cancer if not found and treated.
- ❑ Having a regular Pap test is the best way to find and treat changes early.

How does someone get HPV?

- ❑ HPV is very common. Studies show three out of four people who have had sex have been in contact with some type of HPV.
- ❑ A woman can be exposed to HPV by close genital contact.
- ❑ The virus can pass between two people, mostly through sexual contact.
- ❑ Condoms offer some protection, but HPV may be present on skin that is not covered. You are however encouraged to use condoms.

How do I know I have the virus?

- ❑ The signs of HPV may not show for years after you get the virus or you may never get any signs; usually, there are no symptoms.
- ❑ Some clinics or doctors' offices offer a HPV test after an Abnormal Pap test. A HPV test is done using the Pap test sample. It can find HPV types that can cause cancer of the cervix.
- ❑ You can ask your doctor when you book your Pap test if the HPV test is available to you.

Reducing my risk of HPV infection and cancer of the cervix...

- ❑ *If you are sexually active it is hard to prevent exposure to HPV but you can protect yourself by:*
 - If you are young, delay having sex.
 - Exposure to HPV through sexual contact at a young age seems to increase the risk of cancer of the cervix (***it is believed cervical tissue during puberty undergoes many changes that might make the cervix more open to damage.***)
 - Limit the number of sexual partners – *males who have had many sexual partners are also a factor.*
 - Protect yourself by using a condom.
 - Take care of your immune system, so your body can fight infections, by eating well, exercising, avoid smoking and get plenty of rest.

Coping with HPV?

- ❑ Finding out you have HPV maybe upsetting but remember it is very common.
- ❑ There is no set medical treatment for HPV.
- ❑ For most women the body will fight the virus and cells will go back to normal.
- ❑ Tell your partner you have HPV, and if needed seek treatment for genital warts.
- ❑ If you have abnormal cell changes, remember to follow through with all follow up treatment and appointments.

