

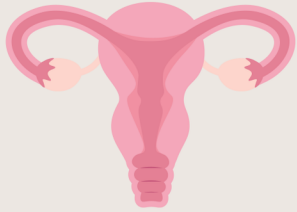
Human papillomavirus (HPV): The facts.



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What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus. 8 in 10 of us will get it at some point during our lives. Your body usually gets rid of HPV within 2 years. HPV itself has no symptoms. Most people never know they have it. There are over 200 types of HPV. Some can cause warts on your hands, feet, or genitals. They are called 'low-risk' HPV. They don't cause cancer. 14 types are linked to cancer. These types are called 'high-risk' HPV.



How do people get HPV?

HPV can be passed on through skin-to-skin contact, including oral, anal, or vaginal sex touching the genital area, and sharing sex toys. Anyone who has any type of sexual contact can get HPV – it's not just penetrative sex. You can get HPV: the first time you have sexual contact no matter your gender identity or sexual orientation.

Can HPV be in my body for a long time without me knowing?

Yes, it can be 'dormant' in your body. This means it's not causing problems and it can't be found with a test. HPV can be dormant for a long time and then become active years after you first got it. Active HPV can be found with a test. This makes it hard to know when you got it and who from. This means if you find you have HPV while you're in a relationship, it doesn't mean someone in the relationship has cheated.

What else should I know about HPV?

Sometimes your body can't get rid of HPV. This is called a 'persistent HPV infection'. HPV itself can't be treated, but there are treatments for the things it might cause, like genital warts, cell changes, and cervical cancer.

Going for cervical screening (previously called a 'smear test') means high-risk HPV and any cell changes can be found early.

Can high-risk HPV cause cervical cancer?

Nearly all cervical cancer (99.7%) is thought to be caused by high-risk HPV.

High-risk HPV sometimes causes cells in the cervix to change. We call these cell changes. They might turn into cervical cancer if they're not monitored or treated.

High-risk HPV can also cause vaginal, vulval, anal and penile cancer, and some head and neck cancers.

Can I reduce my risk of getting HPV?

Stop smoking – smoking weakens your immune system, making it hard to get rid of HPV.

Get vaccinated – the HPV vaccine called Gardasil 9 helps protect against the HPV types that cause more than 9 in 10 cervical cancers and 9 in 10 cases of genital warts.

Have safe sex – using condoms and dental dams help reduce your risk. But HPV lives on the skin of the whole genital area and anus, not just the part you cover, so they don't fully protect you.