

HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV) AND HPV VACCINE

What is it and how did I get it?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common sexually transmitted infection (STI), also known as genital warts or condyloma. There are more than 100 types of HPV. Over 30 different types of HPV affect the genital area. HPV is spread by direct skin to skin contact, usually during oral, vaginal or anal sex. Low risk types cause genital warts and high risk types can cause cervical cancer.

What can happen when I have HPV?

HPV infection will be different for each person.

Once you are exposed to the virus, you might have:

1. Latent infection: At this stage most people will not know they have HPV. The virus can still be spread to others during skin to skin contact. The immune system usually works to clear the virus from the body, which can take one to two years. In about two thirds of female cases, the virus eventually 'shows' itself by warts in the genital area or by abnormal cells showing on a Pap test.
2. Warts: Warts are diagnosed by their appearance. Warts can be alone or in a cluster, painless or itchy and uncomfortable. For women, warts can be anywhere in the anal or genital area, inside the vagina and/or on the cervix. For men, warts can be anywhere in the anal or genital area and/or inside the urethra (tube that carries urine). Warts can show up fairly soon after exposure or months/years after first getting the virus.
3. Pre-cancerous and cancerous changes: These changes happen in men and women if they have one of the high risk strains of HPV (especially 16 or 18). Cancer can occur anywhere in the genital or anal area. The female cervix is the most common place to see cancerous changes. Pre-cancerous changes (abnormal cells) will show on Pap tests long before cancer is seen. These changes can be treated and cancer can be prevented. This is why it is important for all women to have regular Pap tests. 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 and can be ordered by a family doctor. DNA testing is not covered by your Ontario health card and will cost about \$90.

For men, any changes of the skin in the genital area should be seen by a doctor. Although rare, men

with high risk HPV strains are at greater risk for anal and penile cancers. HPV is not believed to cause prostate cancer.

Treatment

Warts that can be seen can be removed by freezing and special medications. **Treatment removes only the wart, not the virus.** 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 this common virus. Sex at an early age and with many partners increases the risk of coming in contact with the virus.

A newly approved vaccine to help prevent HPV is now available for females ages 9 to 26 years. (See other side). Condoms are also important as they help to prevent the spread of HPV, HIV and other STIs. Condoms cannot prevent the spread of HPV completely as they do not cover all the areas of skin that could be infected.

To help prevent HPV from changing to cancer, you should:

- stop smoking (smoking can increase the risk of cancer of the cervix in women with HPV)
- use condoms to avoid getting other STIs
- get tested regularly for STIs and get treated if you have an infection
- get lots of rest, regular exercise and eat a healthy diet to help keep your immune system healthy
- have regular Pap tests

What about sexual partners?

If you have HPV, all sexual partners should be examined. HPV is very contagious and can be 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 and 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?

In July 2006, Health Canada approved a new HPV vaccine which provides protection against four types of HPV– types 6, 11, 16 and 18. In Canada, low-risk types 6 and 11 cause about 90% of genital warts and high risk types 16 and 18 cause 70% of cervical cancer.

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

How good is the vaccine?

The vaccine is almost 100% effective against the four HPV types. The long term protection provided by the vaccine is unknown. A booster may be required for protection beyond five years.

Who should get the HPV vaccine?

The HPV vaccine has been approved for females aged 9 to 26 years. It is most effective when given before becoming sexually active. If you are already infected with HPV, the vaccine can still provide protection against 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

It is not yet known if the vaccine is effective in males.

Is the HPV vaccine safe?

The HPV vaccine is safe and has similar side effects as most other available vaccines. Side effects include redness, tenderness and swelling at the injection site and less commonly fever, nausea, dizziness and headache.

Rare reactions include trouble breathing, swelling in the face or mouth, a fever over 39 degrees C, hives or rashes. If you develop any of these rare reactions within 15 days of getting your needle, please tell your doctor or local health department.

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. The HPV vaccine only gives protection against the most common HPV types that can cause genital warts and cervical cancer. It is still possible for women who have been vaccinated to be infected with one of the less common types. Getting the vaccine and having regular Pap tests 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. If you would like the vaccine and you are not in grade 8, 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, however check with your drug plan as some insurance companies will cover the cost of the vaccine.

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

- American Social Health Association (ASHA) www.ashastd.org
- Ministry of Health and Long Term Care <http://www.hpvontario.ca/>
- Public Health Agency of Canada http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/std-mts/hpv-vph/hpv-vph-vaccine_e.html
- Cancer Care Ontario http://www.cancercare.on.ca/index_cervicalScreening.htm
- Society of Obstetricians and 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 and HIV

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

or visit

peelsexualhealth.ca

peelregion.ca/health

intheknowpeel.ca