



Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

What is it?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs). There are more than 100 known types of HPV with at least 40 that cause genital warts and cancer. Low-risk types of HPV, which cause genital warts, often clear on their own. There are at least 15 cancer-causing HPV types, the most common being HPV types 16 and 18.

How is it spread?

HPV is spread easily through intimate skin to skin contact with the penis, scrotum, vagina, vulva, or anus of someone who has the virus. Touching a partner's genitals with the mouth or fingers can transmit HPV.

What do I look for?

Many people who have been infected do not have any symptoms, but still carry the virus and can pass the virus to their sexual partner(s). Genital warts caused by HPV are usually painless; they can sometimes be itchy, bleed and/or have discharge. In women, regular Pap tests can detect cell changes on the cervix that may be caused by HPV.

How is it treated?

As HPV is caused by a virus, antibiotics are not effective. In most people, the virus usually clears the body by itself. Skin treatments are available to remove the genital warts, but the treatments do not remove the virus from your body. Early detection of changes on the cervix (by a Pap test) and treatment can prevent cancer of the cervix from developing.

How can I protect myself?

Practice safe sex and always use a condom when having oral, vaginal, or anal sex. Condoms do not protect 100% from HPV, but they help reduce your risk of infection and provide protection against other STIs.

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905-668-2020 or 1-800-841-2729 | durham.ca/health

If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.



If you are a woman and sexually active get regular Pap testing to reduce the risk of cancer of the cervix.

HPV vaccines are available to protect you against certain strains of HPV. Talk to your health care provider about getting vaccinated.

If you smoke, consider stopping as people who smoke are at an increased risk of getting HPV.

See Facts About...Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccine.

See Facts About...Genital Warts.

September 26, 2022

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