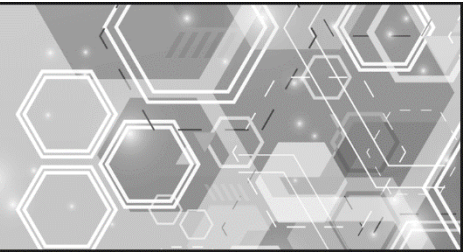




## Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



# 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, and many types can cause genital warts or cancer. Many HPV infections won't have any symptoms and will go away without treatment. HPV infections can cause cancer of the anus, vagina, penis, cervix, mouth or throat. Most of these cancers are caused by HPV types 16 and 18. Low-risk types of HPV such as 6 and 11 can cause genital warts. Approximately 70% of sexually active individuals will be infected with an HPV infection in their lifetime.

## 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 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. Regular Cervical Cancer Screening can detect cell changes on the cervix that may occur due to persistent HPV infection.

## 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 (Cervical Cancer Screening) 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 reduce your risk of infection and provide protection against other STIs.

If you are sexually active and over age 25, get regular Cervical Cancer Screening to reduce the risk of cancer of the cervix. The Ontario Cervical Screening Program recommends that most eligible people get screened every 5 years. Talk to your health care provider to know what is right for you.

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



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](#).

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