

What you need to know –

Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

What is HPV?

HPV (human papillomavirus) is a common virus that affects both females and males.¹ Most types of HPV are harmless, do not cause any symptoms, and go away on their own.¹

About 30 types of HPV are known as genital HPV since they affect the genital area.¹ Some types are high risk² and can cause cervical cancer or abnormal cells in the lining of the cervix that sometimes turn into cancer. Others are low risk³ and can cause genital warts and changes in the cervix that are benign (abnormal but noncancerous).

Who gets genital HPV?

Anyone who has any kind of sexual activity involving genital contact could get genital HPV.¹ Because many people who have HPV may not show any signs or symptoms, they can transmit the virus without even knowing it.

HPV is more common than you might think. In 2005, approximately 20 million Americans had genital HPV.¹ More than 6 million new cases of genital HPV are diagnosed in the United States every year.¹

How do I know if I have HPV?

Because HPV may not show any signs or symptoms, you probably won't know you have it. Most women are diagnosed with HPV as a result of abnormal Pap tests.¹ A Pap test (also known as a Pap smear) is part of a gynecological exam and helps detect abnormal cells in the lining of the cervix before they have the chance to become precancers or cervical cancer.¹

Many cervical precancers (changes that could lead to cancer) are related to HPV and can be treated successfully if detected early.¹ That's why early detection is so important.

What happens if I get HPV?

In most people, the body's defenses are enough to clear HPV. If not cleared by the body, some HPV types cause genital warts. Other types cause abnormal changes in the cells lining the cervix that can lead to precancers and even turn into cervical cancer later in life.¹

This fact sheet does not cover everything there is to know about HPV. Talk to your healthcare professional or visit HPV.com for more information.