Genital HPV Infection – CDC Fact Sheet

What is HPV?
HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI). HPV is a different virus than HIV and HSV (herpes). HPV is so common that nearly all sexually active men and women get it at some point in their lives. There are many different types of HPV. Some types can cause health problems including genital warts and cancers. But there are vaccines that can stop these health problems from happening.

How is HPV spread?
You can get HPV by having oral, vaginal, or anal sex with someone who has the virus. It is most commonly spread during vaginal or anal sex. HPV can be passed even when an infected person has no signs or symptoms.

Anyone who is sexually active can get HPV, even if you have had sex with only one person. You also can develop symptoms years after you have sex with someone who is infected making it hard to know when you first became infected.

Does HPV cause health problems?
In most cases, HPV goes away on its own and does not cause any health problems. But when HPV does not go away, it can cause health problems like genital warts and cancer.

Genital warts usually appear as a small bump or group of bumps in the genital area. They can be small or large, raised or flat, or shaped like a cauliflower. A healthcare provider can usually diagnose warts by looking at the genital area.

Does HPV cause cancer?
HPV can cause cervical and other cancers including cancer of the vulva, vagina, penis, or anus. It can also cause cancer in the back of the throat, including the base of the tongue and tonsils (called oropharyngeal cancer).

Cancer often takes years, even decades, to develop after a person gets HPV. The types of HPV that can cause genital warts are not the same as the types of HPV that can cause cancers.

There is no way to know which people who have HPV will develop cancer or other health problems. People with weak immune systems may be less able to fight off HPV and more likely to develop health problems from it, this includes people with HIV/AIDS.

How can I avoid HPV and the health problems it can cause?
You can do several things to lower your chances of getting HPV.

Get vaccinated. HPV vaccines are safe and effective. They can protect males and females against diseases (including cancers) caused by HPV when given in the recommended age groups (see “Who should get vaccinated?” below). HPV vaccines are given in three shots over six months; it is important to get all three doses.

Get screened for cervical cancer. Routine screening for women aged 21 to 65 years old can prevent cervical cancer.

If you are sexually active
- Use latex condoms the right way every time you have sex. This can lower your chances of getting HPV. But HPV can infect areas that are...
not covered by a condom - so condoms may not give full protection against getting HPV;

- Be in a mutually monogamous relationship – or have sex only with someone who only has sex with you.

Who should get vaccinated?
All boys and girls ages 11 or 12 years should get vaccinated.

Catch-up vaccines are recommended for males through age 21 and for females through age 26, if they did not get vaccinated when they were younger.

The vaccine is also recommended for gay and bisexual men (or any man who has sex with a man) through age 26. It is also recommended for men and women with compromised immune systems (including people living with HIV/AIDS) through age 26, if they did not get fully vaccinated when they were younger.

How do I know if I have HPV?
There is no test to find out a person’s “HPV status.” Also, there is no approved HPV test to find HPV in the mouth or throat.

There are HPV tests that can be used to screen for cervical cancer. These tests are recommended for screening only in women aged 30 years and older. They are not recommended to screen men, adolescents, or women under the age of 30 years.

Most people with HPV do not know they are infected and never develop symptoms or health problems from it. Some people find out they have HPV when they get genital warts. Women may find out they have HPV when they get an abnormal Pap test result (during cervical cancer screening). Others may only find out once they’ve developed more serious problems from HPV, such as cancers.

How common is HPV and the health problems caused by HPV?
HPV (the virus): About 79 million Americans are currently infected with HPV. About 14 million people become newly infected each year. HPV is so common that most sexually active men and women will get at least one type of HPV at some point in their lives.

Health problems related to HPV include genital warts and cervical cancer.

Genital warts: About 360,000 people in the United States get genital warts each year.

Cervical cancer: More than 11,000 women in the United States get cervical cancer each year.

There are other conditions and cancers caused by HPV that occur in persons living in the United States.

I’m pregnant. Will having HPV affect my pregnancy?
If you are pregnant and have HPV, you can get genital warts or develop abnormal cell changes on your cervix. Abnormal cell changes can be found with routine cervical cancer screening. You should get routine cervical cancer screening even when you are pregnant.

Can I be treated for HPV or health problems caused by HPV?
There is no treatment for the virus itself. However, there are treatments for the health problems that HPV can cause:

1. Genital warts can be treated by you or your physician. If left untreated, genital warts may go away, stay the same, or grow in size or number.

2. Cervical precancer can be treated. Women who get routine Pap tests and follow up as needed can identify problems before cancer develops. Prevention is always better than treatment. For more information visit www.cancer.org.

3. Other HPV-related cancers are also more treatable when diagnosed and treated early. For more information visit www.cancer.org.

Where can I get more information?
STD information
http://www.cdc.gov/std/

HPV Information
http://www.cdc.gov/hpv/

HPV Vaccination
http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/hpv/

Cancer Information
http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/

Cervical Cancer Screening
http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic_info/screening.htm

CDC’s National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program
http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbcedd/

CDC-INFO Contact Center
1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)
Contact www.cdc.gov/info

CDC National Prevention Information Network (NPIN)
https://npin.cdc.gov/disease/stds
P.O. Box 6003
Rockville, MD 20849-6003
E-mail: npin-info@cdc.gov

National HPV and Cervical Cancer Prevention Resource Center
American Sexual Health Association (ASHA)
http://www.ashasexualhealth.org/stdsstis/hpv/
P.O. Box 13827
Research Triangle Park, NC 27709-3827
1-800-783-9877
Cervical Cancer

There are five main types of cancer that affect a woman's reproductive organs: cervical, ovarian, uterine, vaginal, and vulvar. As a group, they are referred to as gynecologic (GY-neh-kuh-LAH-jik) cancer. (A sixth type of gynecologic cancer is the very rare fallopian tube cancer.)

This fact sheet about cervical cancer is part of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Inside Knowledge: Get the Facts About Gynecologic Cancer campaign. The campaign helps women get the facts about gynecologic cancer, providing important "inside knowledge" about their bodies and health.

What is cervical cancer?
Cancer is a disease in which cells in the body grow out of control. Cancer is always named for the part of the body where it starts, even if it spreads to other body parts later.

When cancer starts in the cervix, it is called cervical cancer. The cervix is the lower, narrow end of the uterus. The cervix connects the vagina (the birth canal) to the upper part of the uterus. The uterus (or womb) is where a baby grows when a woman is pregnant.

Cervical cancer is the easiest gynecologic cancer to prevent with regular screening tests and follow-up. It also is highly curable when found and treated early.

Who gets cervical cancer?
All women are at risk for cervical cancer. It occurs most often in women over age 30. Each year, approximately 12,000 women in the United States get cervical cancer.

The human papillomavirus (HPV) is the main cause of cervical cancer. HPV is a common virus that is passed from one person to another during sex. At least half of sexually active people will have HPV at some point in their lives, but few women will get cervical cancer.

What are the symptoms?
Early on, cervical cancer may not cause signs and symptoms. Advanced cervical cancer may cause bleeding or discharge from the vagina that is not normal for you, such as bleeding after sex. If you have any of these signs, see your doctor. They may be caused by something other than cancer, but the only way to know is to see your doctor.

Are there tests that can prevent cervical cancer or find it early?
There are two tests that can either help prevent cervical cancer or find it early:
- The Pap test (or Pap smear) looks for precancers, cell changes, on the cervix that can be treated, so that cervical cancer is prevented. The Pap test also can find cervical cancer early, when treatment is most effective. The Pap test is recommended for women aged 21-65 years old.
- The HPV test only screens for cervical cancer. It does not screen for any other gynecologic cancer.
- The HPV test looks for HPV—the virus that can cause precancerous cell changes and cervical cancer.

Inside Knowledge is an initiative that supports the Gynecologic Cancer Education and Awareness Act of 2005, or Johanna's Law, which was unanimously passed by the U.S. House and Senate in December of 2006, and signed into law in January 2007.
When should I get tested for cervical cancer?

The Pap test is one of the most reliable and effective cancer screening tests available. You should start getting regular Pap tests at age 21. If your Pap test results are normal, your doctor may say that you will not need another Pap test for three years.

The HPV test can be used to screen for cervical cancer along with the Pap test in women aged 30 years and older. It also is used to provide more information when women aged 21 years and older have unclear Pap test results.

If you are age 30 or older, you may choose to have an HPV test along with the Pap test. If the results are normal, your chance of getting cervical cancer in the next few years is very low. Your doctor may then say that you can wait up to five years for your next screening.

For women aged 21-65, it is important to continue getting a Pap test as directed by your doctor—even if you think you are too old to have a child or are not having sex anymore. However, your doctor may tell you that you do not need to have a Pap test if either of these is true for you:

- You are older than 65 and have had normal Pap test results for several years.
- You have had your cervix removed as part of a total hysterectomy for non-cancerous conditions, like fibroids.

What raises a woman’s chance of getting cervical cancer?

Almost all cervical cancers are caused by HPV. You are more likely to get HPV if you started having sex at an early age, or if you or your partner have had sex with several others. However, any woman who has ever had sex is at risk for HPV.

There are many types of HPV. Usually HPV will go away on its own, but if it does not, it may cause cervical cancer over time.

In addition to having HPV, these things also can increase your risk of cervical cancer:

- Smoking.
- Having HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) or another condition that makes it hard for your body to fight off health problems.
- Using birth control pills for a long time (five or more years).
- Having given birth to three or more children.

How can I prevent cervical cancer?

- Get the HPV vaccine. It protects against the types of HPV that most often cause cervical, vaginal, and vulvar cancers. It is given in a series of three shots. The vaccine is recommended for 11 and 12 year old girls. It is also recommended for girls and women aged 13 through 26 who did not get any or all of the shots when they were younger. (Note: The vaccine can be given to girls beginning at age 9.)
- See your doctor regularly for a Pap test that can find cervical precancers.
- Follow up with your doctor, if your Pap test results are not normal.
- Don’t smoke.
- Use condoms during sex.*
- Limit your number of sexual partners.

What should I do if my doctor says I have cervical cancer?

If your doctor says that you have cervical cancer, ask to be referred to a gynecologic oncologist—a doctor who has been trained to treat cancers like this. This doctor will work with you to create a treatment plan.

Where can I find free or low-cost Pap tests?

If you have a low income or do not have insurance, you may be able to get a free or low-cost Pap test through the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection Program. To learn more, call 1-800-CDC-INFO or visit www.cdc.gov/cancer/nbccecpd.

Where can I find more information about cervical and other gynecologic cancers?

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: 1-800-CDC-INFO or www.cdc.gov/cancer

National Cancer Institute: 1-800-4-CANCER or www.cancer.gov

* HPV infection can occur in both male and female genital areas that are covered or protected by a latex condom, as well as in areas that are not covered. While the effect of condoms in preventing HPV infection is unknown, condom use has been associated with a lower rate of cervical cancer.

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Inside Knowledge Get the Facts About Gynecologic Cancer

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
What is genital herpes?
Genital herpes is an STD caused by two types of viruses. The viruses are called herpes simplex type 1 and herpes simplex type 2.

How common is genital herpes?
Genital herpes is common in the United States. In the United States, about one out of every six people aged 14 to 49 years have genital herpes.

How is genital herpes spread?
You can get herpes by having oral, vaginal, or anal sex with someone who has the disease.

Fluids found in a herpes sore carry the virus, and contact with those fluids can cause infection. You can also get herpes from an infected sex partner who does not have a visible sore or who may not know he or she is infected because the virus can be released through your skin and spread the infection to your sex partner(s).

How can I reduce my risk of getting herpes?
The only way to avoid STDs is to not have vaginal, anal, or oral sex. If you are sexually active, you can do the following things to lower your chances of getting herpes:

- Being in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who has been tested and has negative STD test results;
- Using latex condoms the right way every time you have sex.

Herpes symptoms can occur in both male and female genital areas that are covered by a latex condom. However, outbreaks can also occur in areas that are not covered by a condom so condoms may not fully protect you from getting herpes.

I'm pregnant. How could genital herpes affect my baby?
If you are pregnant and have genital herpes, it is even more important for you to go to prenatal care visits. You need to tell your doctor if you have ever had symptoms of, been exposed to, or been diagnosed with genital herpes. Sometimes genital herpes infection can lead to miscarriage. It can also make it more likely for you to deliver your baby too early. Herpes infection can be passed from you to your unborn child and cause a potentially deadly infection (neonatal herpes). It is important that you avoid getting herpes during pregnancy.

If you are pregnant and have genital herpes, you may be offered herpes medicine towards the end of your pregnancy to reduce the risk of having any symptoms and passing the disease to your baby. At the time of delivery your doctor should carefully examine you for symptoms. If you have herpes symptoms at delivery, a 'C-section' is usually performed.

How do I know if I have genital herpes?
Most people who have herpes have no, or very mild symptoms. You may not notice mild symptoms or you may mistake them for another skin
condition, such as a pimple or ingrown hair. Because of this, most people who have herpes do not know it.

Genital herpes sores usually appear as one or more blisters on or around the genitals, rectum or mouth. The blisters break and leave painful sores that may take weeks to heal. These symptoms are sometimes called “having an outbreak.” The first time someone has an outbreak they may also have flu-like symptoms such as fever, body aches, or swollen glands.

Repeat outbreaks of genital herpes are common, especially during the first year after infection. Repeat outbreaks are usually shorter and less severe than the first outbreak. Although the infection can stay in the body for the rest of your life, the number of outbreaks tends to decrease over a period of years.

You should be examined by your doctor if you notice any of these symptoms or if your partner has an STD or symptoms of an STD, such as an unusual sore, a smelly discharge, burning when urinating, or, for women specifically, bleeding between periods.

**How will my doctor know if I have herpes?**

Often times, your healthcare provider can diagnose genital herpes by simply looking at your symptoms. Providers can also take a sample from the sore(s) and test it. Have an honest and open talk with your healthcare provider and ask whether you should be tested for herpes or other STDs.

**Can herpes be cured?**

There is no cure for herpes. However, there are medicines that can prevent or shorten outbreaks. One of these herpes medicines can be taken daily, and makes it less likely that you will pass the infection on to your sex partner(s).

**What happens if I don’t get treated?**

Genital herpes can cause painful genital sores and can be severe in people with suppressed immune systems. If you touch your sores or the fluids from the sores, you may transfer herpes to another part of your body, such as your eyes. Do not touch the sores or fluids to avoid spreading herpes to another part of your body.

If you touch the sores or fluids, immediately wash your hands thoroughly to help avoid spreading your infection.

Some people who get genital herpes have concerns about how it will impact their overall health, sex life, and relationships. It is best for you to talk to a healthcare provider about those concerns, but it is also important to recognize that while herpes is not curable, it can be managed. Since a genital herpes diagnosis may affect how you will feel about current or future sexual relationships, it is important to understand how to talk to sexual partners about STDs. You can find one resource here: GYT Campaign, http://npin.cdc.gov/stdawareness/

If you are pregnant, there can be problems for you and your unborn child. See “I’m pregnant. How could genital herpes affect my baby?” above for information about this.

**Can I still have sex if I have herpes?**

If you have herpes, you should tell your sex partner(s) and let him or her know that you do and the risk involved. Using condoms may help lower this risk but it will not get rid of the risk completely. Having sores or other symptoms of herpes can increase your risk of spreading the disease. Even if you do not have any symptoms, you can still infect your sex partners.

**What is the link between genital herpes and HIV?**

Genital herpes can cause sores or breaks in the skin or lining of the mouth, vagina, and rectum. The genital sores caused by herpes can bleed easily. When the sores come into contact with the mouth, vagina, or rectum during sex, they increase the risk of giving or getting HIV if you or your partner has HIV.