



FACT SHEET

TOOL KIT FOR TEEN CARE, SECOND EDITION

HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS

What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

- Human papillomavirus is a family of viruses that causes infection on the skin or mucous membranes of various areas of the body.
- There are many different types of HPV. Different types of HPV infection affect different areas of the body.
- Some types of HPV cause warts in the genital area. These may be called genital warts, venereal warts, or condyloma.
- Other types of HPV can lead to abnormal cells on the cervix (the opening to your uterus). If not detected and treated, over time, these abnormal cells can develop into cancer.

How common is HPV?

- Genital HPV is the most common sexually transmitted disease in the United States.
- Three out of four people who have sex will get genital HPV infection at some time in their lives.
- Currently, 20 million people are infected with HPV, and there will be more than 6 million new cases of HPV each year. Human papillomavirus is most common in young women and men who are in their late teens and early 20s.

How does a person get a genital HPV infection?

- The most common ways to get an HPV infection is from vaginal or anal sex with an infected person; however, this is not the only way to get it. You also can get an HPV infection from oral sex. Any skin-to-skin contact with areas affected by HPV (eg, penis to vulva, penis to anus, and vulva to vulva) can cause the infection to be spread.
- People do not get genital HPV infection by coming into contact with warts on their hands or feet.

How do you know if you have an HPV infection?

- Most people who have been infected with genital HPV have no signs or symptoms.
- Women can have HPV on their cervix without any symptoms.
- Routine Pap tests (a screening test for cervical cancer) can diagnose HPV infections.
- You should have your first Pap test at age 21 years.
- Even if it is not time for your Pap test, if you are sexually active, you should see a health care provider once a year or whenever you change sexual partners.

How do you know if you have genital warts?

- Genital warts look like flesh-colored bumps. They can be raised or flat, small or large, and can be just one or many clustered together. Most of the time they are not bothersome but sometimes they can itch or bleed if they are scratched.
- Young women can have warts on the vulva (the outside area where your female organs are located), vagina, or anus.
- Men can have warts on the penis, scrotum (the sack where the testicles are located), genital area, or anus.

What do you do if you think you have an HPV infection?

- If you know you have a genital HPV infection, you should contact your health care provider.
- Health care providers have a variety of methods for treating visible warts, such as chemical treatments, freezing, and surgery.
- Treatments may need to occur more than once because genital warts can come back, even after treatment.
- There are no over-the-counter medicines to treat genital warts.





What is the best way to prevent an HPV infection?

- Abstinence (or not having sex) is the only way to avoid getting an HPV infection.
- If a person does have sex, the chances of getting an HPV infection can be decreased by using the following methods:
 - Having sex with only one partner who has sex with only one partner
 - Using condoms. It is important to remember that condoms only decrease the risk of HPV infection over the areas they cover.
 - Avoiding smoking. If you do not smoke, your body can fight the infection more easily.

Is there a vaccine to prevent HPV?

- There is a vaccine that prevents infection in women from four types of HPV. Two of the types are the cause of most genital warts, and the other two types are the cause of most cervical cancers. Another vaccine that protects against the two HPV types that cause the most cervical cancer is also available. Each vaccine is given in three separate doses. It is important to discuss the available vaccines with your health care provider.
- Both vaccines are more effective when you complete all three doses before you have sex for the first time.
- It is recommended that it be given to all girls between the ages of 11 years and 12 years, but it can be given to girls as young as 9 years old. The vaccine also is recommended for all girls and young women aged 13–26 years who did not get it when they were younger.
- The vaccine that prevents infection from four types of HPV may also be given to boys between the ages of 9 and 18 years to reduce the chance of getting genital warts.
- Ask your health care provider about the benefits of these vaccines and if you can get them.
- Because these vaccines do not protect against all types of the virus, having received the vaccination does not mean you cannot catch other types of the virus. So, you should still regularly see your health care provider once you become sexually active.
- If you are sexually active and already have an infection with one of the types in the vaccine, the vaccination will not help you get rid of the infection.

Millions of people get HPV. For most, it does not become cancer. It is important to know that someone with HPV infection can lead a normal, healthy life. The following resources can help.

For More Information

We have provided information on the following organizations and web sites because they have information that may be of interest to our readers. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) does not necessarily endorse the views expressed or the facts presented by these organizations or on these web sites. Further, ACOG does not endorse any commercial products that may be advertised or available from these organizations or on these web sites.

American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists
Telephone: (202) 638-5577 or (800) 673-8444
Web: www.acog.org

The American Social Health Association
Telephone: (919) 361-8400
STI Resource Hotline: (800) 227-8922
Web: www.ashastd.org

American Society for Colposcopy and Cervical Pathology
Telephone: (301) 733-3640
Web: www.asccp.org

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Telephone: (404) 639-3534 or (800) 311-3435
Web: www.cdc.gov

Center for Young Women's Health
Telephone: (617) 355-2994
Web: www.youngwomenshealth.org

Go Ask Alice
Telephone (212) 854-5453
Web: www.goaskalice.columbia.edu

National Cervical Cancer Public Education Campaign
Telephone: (312) 578-1439 or (800) 444-4441
Web: www.cervicalcancercampaign.org

National HPV and Cervical Cancer Prevention Resource Center
Web: www.ashastd.org/hpv/hpv_overview.cfm

National Women's Health Resource Center
Telephone: (877) 986-9472
Web: www.healthywomen.org

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada
Telephone: (800) 561-2416 or (613) 730-4192
Web: http://sogc.medical.org/index_e.asp
www.sexualityandu.ca/home_e.aspx

Teenwire
Planned Parenthood Federation of America
Telephone: (800) 230-PLAN (7526) or (212) 541-7800
Web: www.teenwire.com