



HPV Fact Sheet

What is HPV, also known as genital warts

- The human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the world today.
- Approximately 75% of sexually active Canadians will have at least one HPV infection in their lifetime, with the highest rates of HPV infection occurring in young people aged 15 to 24.
- 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.
- The focus here is on genital warts. More about HPV and the types of HPV that are associated with cancer – and how to prevent them – can be found on the SOGC's HPV website, www.hpvinfosite.ca

Frequently Asked Questions about HPV (ImmunizeBC)

<https://immunizebc.ca/diseases-vaccinations/hpv/hpv-vaccine-faq-0>

Every year in the province of BC approximately:

- 200 women will get cervical cancer
- 50 women will die from the disease
- 6 000 women will develop high risk pre-cancerous changes to the cervix
- 10 000 invasive procedures will be done to stop cancer of the cervix from developing

How can you get it?

- HPV is usually passed through vaginal, oral and anal sex.
- HPV can be passed through other intimate contact, including skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity such as genital rubbing – intercourse isn't necessary.
- HPV can also be passed to an infant during delivery (rare).
- Most females get an HPV infection of the cervix within 2 to 5 years of starting sexual activity.

Symptoms

When someone becomes infected with HPV there are no signs and symptoms. People don't know they are infected.

Genital warts:

- No symptoms
- Itchiness
- Discomfort during intercourse
- Bleeding with intercourse or with shaving
- Warts on the penis or vulva, which appear as small cauliflower-like growths
- During pregnancy, warts may increase in size and number and then regress/resolve after delivery

Cervical cancer:

- Often no symptoms
- Bleeding between periods or after intercourse
- Found after an abnormal pap test

Other cancers caused by HPV:

- HPV has been associated with some cancers on the vulva, in the anus, on the penis, and in the throat. Atypical symptoms from these areas, especially bleeding, itchiness, or pain should prompt a visit to the doctor.





To know if you have HPV you need to get tested

- Most genital warts are diagnosed by visual inspection. If there is any doubt, a biopsy can be taken.
- Cervical Cancer Screening – If you are female, the best defence against cervical cancer is to have regular Pap and/or HPV tests. These tests will detect abnormal cells in your cervix that could lead to cervical cancer. A female should visit a health care provider to have cervical cancer screening tests every few years or according to the guidelines in their province or territory.
- Cervical cancer can be screened for by Pap tests and/or HPV tests.
- Males can be examined by their doctor for genital warts caused by HPV and for signs of cancers of the penis, anus, and mouth and throat.

A doctor or nurse may do a pap test if you are sexually active and have multiple partners or take sample scrapings of the warts and send them to the lab for confirmation.

A simple Pap test can detect the changes in the cervix. It's important for women to have regular Pap tests, especially if you're having sex.

Treatment

- There are no treatments or drugs that can kill or get rid of the HPV virus.
- Pre-cancerous warts can usually be treated successfully.
- People with conditions affecting their immune system, including HIV, cancer, on immune suppressant medication for organ transplantation, and auto-immune conditions (such as systemic lupus erythematosus) need more frequent screening for HPV.
- There are treatments for genital warts and cell changes caused by the virus, but these do not cure the virus itself.

- Once you have an HPV infection, the immune system will most often clear the virus, in most people, within one to two years.
- HPV infections can reoccur in the future.
- Once you know you have HPV, you are advised to tell your partner(s) so they can be checked out.

Prevention

- Condoms can help prevent the spread of HPV, but they do not provide full protection.
- The most up-to-date vaccine provides protection against 7 HPV types associated with 90% of cervical cancers.
- In Canada, HPV vaccination is approved for females from ages 9 – 45 and males from
- ages 9 – 26.
- Shaving the genital area can promote the spread of genital warts.
- Vaccination works best before you are sexually active or have already become infected or exposed to an HPV virus, but can help reduce the risk of HPV-related disease at any time, even after an abnormal Pap test.
- The risk of infection increases with the number of sexual partners and having unprotected sex.

Complications

- Once infected with HPV, you are at higher risk of re-infection and of persistent HPV infection. Then both genital warts and cancerous changes to the cervix can reoccur. This can be of concern for those with weakened immune systems, for example, after organ transplantation, during cancer treatment, or in conditions of immune deficiency such as AIDS or HIV infection.
- Counselling may be useful to help with relationship issues that may arise from the complex nature of the infection.

