

### What is HPV?

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) and is caused by a virus. 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.

### How is HPV spread?

HPV is a virus passed from one person to another during skin-to-skin sexual contact, including vaginal, oral, and 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.

### What type of health problems are caused by HPV?

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 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).

### What are the signs and symptoms of HPV?

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. Genital warts are not a life-threatening disease, but they can cause emotional stress, and their treatment can be very uncomfortable.

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.

### How can HPV be prevented?

You can do several things to lower your chances of getting HPV.

- *Get vaccinated – females and males.* 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; and 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. Tests 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.

## 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.

## How is HPV treated?

There is no treatment for the virus itself. However, there are treatments for the health problems that HPV can cause:

- 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.
- 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. Other HPV-related cancers are also more treatable when diagnosed and treated early.

## Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- Utah Cancer Control Program
- [Centers for Disease Control & Prevention](#)

Adapted from the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention

