

Human Papillomavirus



What Is Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a very common virus that can be spread through direct contact with infected skin or mucous membranes during vaginal, anal or oral sex. Nearly eight in 10 individuals in the United States will encounter an HPV infection at some point in their lifetime.

There are more than 100 types of HPV. Generally speaking, these can be classified as:

- Low risk, or those that cause oral, oropharyngeal (throat) or genital warts.
- High risk, or those that cause cervical, vaginal, vulvar, penile, anal or oropharyngeal (throat) cancer

How Do I Know if I Have HPV?

Typically, an individual with an active HPV infection does not experience symptoms. In most cases, an HPV infection is cleared by the body's immune system without causing any health problems.

However, when HPV infection persists, it can contribute to health problems like genital warts and cancer.

At this time, there are no recommended tests for HPV. However, some women may be tested for certain high-risk strains during a pap smear.

How Can I Prevent HPV?

Get the HPV vaccine.

Vaccination interrupts the transmission of HPV and reduces the risk that you'll contract the virus. It also protects against high-risk subtypes that could lead to precancer, cancer and genital warts.

Lower risk through safe sex practices.

Use condoms whenever you have vaginal, anal or oral sex, but be aware that condoms cover only a small percentage of skin and do not completely protect against HPV. Limiting your number of sexual partners can also help lower your risk.

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