

Human papillomavirus (HPV)

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is one of the most common causes of sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the world. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), there are approximately 6.2 million new cases of sexually transmitted HPV infections reported every year. Health experts estimate there are more cases of genital HPV infection than any other STI in the United States.

There are more than 100 different types of HPV that are classified as high risk and low risk, out of which 30 HPV spread through sexual contact. Some types of HPV cause genital warts. Single or multiple bumps are seen in the genital areas of men and women including the vagina, cervix, vulva (area outside of the vagina), penis, and rectum in such cases. These are classified as low risk types. Common skin warts on the hands and soles of the feet could be caused by some types of HPV but they do not cause genital warts. You can get Genital warts during oral, vaginal, or anal sex with an infected partner as they are very contagious. HPV infection can also spread by skin-to-skin contact during vaginal, anal, or (rarely) oral sex with someone who is infected. In women Genital warts can grow inside and around the outside of the vagina, on the vulva (opening to the vagina) and cervix, groin and in or around the anus. In men, genital warts can grow on the penis, scrotum, thigh, groin, or in or around the anus. While rarely, genital warts grow in the mouth or throat of a person who has had oral sex with an infected person. The size of genital warts may be so small, you can't see them with your eyes or it can be flat and flesh-colored or look bumpy like cauliflower. It is a possibility that warts may never appear. They may cause itching, burning, and discomfort. In fact, most people with low-risk types of genital HPV never know they are infected because they don't get warts or any other symptom. Most sexually active people have HPV at some point in their lives, though most will never know it because its usual growths are usually flat and invisible.

It is said that approximately 10 of the 30 identified genital HPV types can lead, in rare cases, to development of cervical cancer. High-risk types of HPV could lead to cancers of the cervix, vulva, vagina, anus, or penis.

To know that you have an HPV infection you can have a Pap test. This test can find changes on the cervix, caused by an HPV infection. The doctor uses a small brush to take cells from your cervix. It is a simple, fast and the best way to find out if your cervix is healthy. If you are of the age of 30 and above the doctor may also do an HPV test without a Pap test. If you have genital warts then as said earlier it can tell you that you have an HPV infection. HPV mostly does not cause serious health problems in men, with the exception of anal cancer in men who have sex with men. There is no test for HPV in men.

The HPV vaccine is generally recommended for 11-12 year-old girls. It can also be given to girls as young as 9. The vaccine is also recommended for females' from 13 to 26 years of age who have not yet received or completed the vaccine series. The vaccine should be given before the females are sexually active as they get the full benefits of the vaccine when they are not infected with any of those four HPV. It is yet not known if the vaccine is effective in boys or men.

About the Author

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