

HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV)

What is genital HPV infection?

- ❖ Genital HPV infection is a STD that is caused by the Human Papillomavirus.
- ❖ The virus can infect the genital area of men and women including the skin of the penis, vulva and anus, and the linings of the vagina, cervix or rectum.
- ❖ Most people who have HPV have no symptoms and it will clear on their own.
- ❖ Some “high-risk” types of HPV may lead to cancer of the cervix, vulva, vagina, anus or penis. “Low-risk” types may cause abnormal Pap tests or genital warts.

How common is HPV?

- ❖ Approximately 20 million people are currently infected with HPV.
- ❖ At least 50% of sexually active men and women acquire HPV infection at some point in their life.
- ❖ About 6.2 million Americans get a new genital HPV infection each year.

What are the signs and symptoms of genital HPV infection?

- ❖ Most people with HPV don’t know they are infected.
- ❖ Some people get visible genital warts, or have pre-cancerous changes in the cervix, vulva, anus, or penis.
- ❖ Very rarely does HPV infection result in anal or genital cancers.

How do people get genital HPV infections?

- ❖ The types of HPV that infect the genital area are spread through genital contact.
- ❖ Even if you or your partner have no signs or symptoms, HPV can still be transmitted.
- ❖ After sexual contact with an infected person, warts may appear within weeks or months, or not at all.
- ❖ Visible genital warts can be removed by medications or treatments performed by a health care provider.
- ❖ There is no “cure” for HPV.

What is the connection between HPV infection and cervical cancer?

- ❖ Approximately 10 of the 30 identified genital HPV types can lead, in rare cases, to development of cervical cancer.
- ❖ Only a small proportion of women have persistent infection, and persistent infection with “high-risk” types of HPV is the main risk factor for cervical cancer.
- ❖ A Pap test can detect pre-cancerous and cancerous cells on the cervix. Regular Pap testing and careful medical follow-up can help ensure that pre-cancerous changes in the cervix caused by HPV infection do not develop into life threatening cervical cancer.

How can people reduce their risk for genital HPV infection?

- ❖ The surest way to eliminate risk for genital HPV infection is to refrain from any genital contact with another individual.
- ❖ For those who choose to be sexually active, a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship with an uninfected partner is the strategy most likely to prevent future genital HPV infections.
- ❖ For those choosing to be sexually active and who are not in long-term mutually monogamous relationships, reducing the number of sexual partners and choosing a partner less likely to be infected may reduce the risk of genital HPV infection.
- ❖ HPV infection can occur in both male and female genital areas that are covered or protected by a latex condom, as well as in areas not covered. While the effect of condoms in preventing HPV infection is unknown, condom use has been associated with a lower rate of cervical cancer.