



# Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

## FACT SHEET



### What is it?

- Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a family of viruses, including several that can cause genital warts or specific cancers.
- Genital warts are skin-colored bumps that grow on, near, or inside the genitals, anus, or throat.
- Certain HPV strains can cause cervical cancer in women. They can also cause cancers of the anus, vagina, and vulva.

### How is it transmitted?

- Human papillomavirus is transmitted by having vaginal, oral, or anal sex with an infected person.
- HPV can be transmitted by hand or genital contact with infected areas of the body, even if genital warts cannot be seen.
- HPV is very contagious.
- Genital warts may show up weeks to months after having sex with an infected partner.
- Some people can carry HPV without ever having symptoms.
- A person with HPV can give it to someone else, even though there are no visible warts.

### What are symptoms of infection?

- Genital warts cause itching and burning around the sex organs.
- Visible and invisible skin-colored warts grow on, near, and inside the genitals, anus, or throat.
- Warts rarely go away unless treated.

### Human Papillomavirus...

- ...is transmitted by hand, oral, or genital contact with infected areas of the body, even if genital warts are not present.
- ...can cause genital warts, which can be removed, but may come back. HPV can be present with or without genital warts.
- ...is also associated with various cervical and anal cancers in infected people.
- ...is not curable.
- ...can often be prevented with immunization.

### What are other consequences of infection?

- Genital warts can increase in size and number. They can block the openings of the vagina, anus, or throat.
- Persons who have HPV should tell sex partners, even if warts are not present.
- An infected mother can give her baby HPV during birth.
- HPV is the primary cause of specific cancers in infected people.

### How is it diagnosed?

- Local health departments, school-based health clinics, and other doctor's offices may offer confidential, free or low-cost testing and treatment for HPV for young people.
- The only way for a person to be sure if he or she has HPV is to visit a doctor or nurse and ask to be tested for HPV. They will do a pelvic exam for women and a visual examination of the genitalia for men. Doctors can also order a DNA test to detect the HPV in women who have an abnormal Pap smear.

### Is there a treatment? A cure?

- HPV cannot be cured.
- Genital warts do not go away, but they can be treated.
- Doctors can remove the warts, but they may come back.
- Genital warts and cervical cancer caused by HPV can often be prevented by being vaccinated against the viruses that cause them.

### How can it be avoided?

- Abstain from vaginal, oral, and anal sex.
- Avoid sexual contact where the genitals or hand of one person come in contact with the genitals, anus, mouth, or infected skin of another person.
- Reduce the risk of getting genital warts by avoiding contact if warts are present. However, genital warts are often not visible.
- Get vaccinated against HPV to greatly reduce the risk of getting infected with HPV, getting some cancers, and getting genital warts.