



GENITAL HUMAN PAPILLOMA VIRUS (HPV) FACT SHEET

Dartmouth/Northern New England COOP Project

1. HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection in North America. Studies suggest at least 3 out of every 4 people will contract an HPV infection during their lifetime.
2. There are more than 100 subtypes of Genital HPV that have been identified; 30 of them affect the genital tract.
3. All types of HPV are spread by SKIN TO SKIN contact. Sexually related transmission of the anogenital subtypes can come from scrotal to vulvar contact and from genital to oral or anal contact. Sex toys and fingers can theoretically pass the HPV back and forth.
4. Risk factors for HPV including previous treatment for cancer or precancer, HIV infection, weakened immune system, exposure to DES before birth, multiple sex partners, older age, long term use of oral contraceptives, high parity (5 or more full-term pregnancies), and smoking.
5. As with many STIs, there are often no signs of genital HPV, except with the few subtypes that cause condyloma acuminata (venereal warts).
6. HPV is the only cause of cervical cancer. HPV may also be linked to cancer of the anus, vulva, vagina and penis.
7. HPV testing for women is now available and may be performed along with a pap smear. This testing can check for the "high risk" subtypes of HPV that may lead to cervical cancer. Screening is only recommended over age 30 because the prevalence is too high in younger population.
8. Women with ASCUS pap smear results and high risk HPV should pursue further testing by colposcopy.
9. Currently there is no testing available to detect HPV in men.
10. Condoms have not been shown to be effective in preventing the spread of HPV, probably because they only cover the penile shaft.
11. Routine HPV testing is not recommended in women younger than 30 years of age because HPV is very common in this age group and cervical cancer is very rare.
12. Currently there is no cure for HPV, although a vaccine is being developed which may become available by 2010. This bivalent vaccine has been shown to be safe and effective in preventing infection with subtypes 16 and 18, which are responsible for nearly 75% of all cervical cancer.
13. If someone was exposed to a type of HPV that causes genital warts, it is unlikely that he or she will become re-infected with that same type, since immunity will be established at some point.
14. The types of HPV that cause genital warts do not cause warts on other body parts such as the hands and feet, and vice versa.

Adapted from:

1. American Social Health Association <<http://www.ashastd.org/stdfaqs/hpv.html>>
2. Anhang R. et al., HPV Communication: Review of Existing Research and Recommendations for Patient Education. CA Cancer J Clin 2004; 54:248-259
3. Harper, D. personal communication Nov 2004

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