



HUMAN PAPILOMA VIRUS (HPV/GENITAL WARTS)

What is the HUMAN PAPILOMA VIRUS (HPV)?

Human Papilloma Virus, more commonly known as HPV, is a viral infection spread through skin-to-skin sexual contact. HPV is a group of over 100 different strains or types. Over 30 of these are sexually transmitted, and they can infect the genital area, like the skin of the penis, vulva, labia, or anus, or the tissues covering the vagina and cervix. Genital warts are single or multiple growths or bumps that appear in the genital area, and sometimes form a cauliflower-like shape.

How do people get genital HPV infections?

The types of HPV that infect the genital area are spread primarily through genital contact. Most HPV infections have no signs or symptoms. Therefore, most infected persons are unaware they are infected, yet they can transmit the virus to a sex partner.

What are the signs and symptoms of genital infection?

Some but not all people with genital HPV infection get visible genital warts. Most people who have a genital HPV infection are symptom-less and do not know they are infected.

What are genital warts?

Some but not all people with genital HPV infection get visible genital warts. Genital warts appear as single or soft, moist, pink or red swellings that appear in the genital area. They can be raised or flat, single or multiple, small or large. Some cluster, forming a cauliflower-like shape. Warts can appear on the vulva, in or around the vagina or anus, on the cervix, and on the penis, scrotum, groin or thigh. Warts can appear within several weeks after sexual contact with an infected person, or they can take months to appear.

Who is at risk for genital HPV infection?

Anyone who has sex is at risk for genital HPV infection.

How is genital HPV infection diagnosed?

Most women are diagnosed with HPV on the basis of abnormal Pap smears. Pap smears are the primary screening tool for cervical cancer or pre-cancerous conditions, many of which are cell changes related to HPV.



Frequently Asked Questions

How is genital HPV infection treated?

There is no "cure" for HPV infection, although in most women the infection goes away on its own. The treatments provided are directed to the changes in the skin or mucous membrane caused by HPV infection, such as warts and pre-cancerous changes in the cervix.

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. A Pap test can detect pre-cancerous and cancerous cells on the cervix. Regular Pap testing and careful medical follow-up, with treatment if necessary, can help ensure that pre-cancerous changes in the cervix caused by HPV infection do not develop into life-threatening cervical cancer.

How can genital HPV infection be prevented?

The surest way to avoid transmission of sexually transmitted diseases is to abstain from sexual contact, or to be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship with a partner who was tested and is known to be uninfected. Latex or polyurethane male condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can reduce the risk of transmission of HPV, but cannot eliminate HPV transmission.

On June 8, 2006, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) licensed the first vaccine developed to prevent cervical cancer and other diseases in females caused by certain types of genital human papilloma virus (HPV). The HPV vaccine is recommended for 11-12 year-old girls but can be administered to girls as young as 9 years of age. The vaccine also is recommended for 13-26 year-old females who have not yet received or completed the vaccine series.

For more information:

Call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at 1-800-232-4636, TTY: 1-888-232-6348 in English and Spanish.