



Indiana State  
Department of Health  
Epidemiology Resource Center

## Quick Facts: Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

### What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus (also called HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the United States. There are more than 40 HPV types that can infect the mouth, throat, and genital areas of males and females. A handful of these types can cause a variety of types of cancer. **Nearly all** cervical cancer in women is caused by HPV infection. Most people who become infected with HPV do not even know they have it.

### What are the symptoms of HPV?

Most people with HPV do not develop symptoms or health problems from it. In 90% of cases, the body's immune system clears HPV naturally within two years. But sometimes, certain types of HPV can cause genital warts in males and females. Other HPV types can cause cervical cancer. These types can also cause other serious cancers, including cancers of the vulva, vagina, penis, anus, and head and neck (tongue, tonsils and throat).

### How is HPV spread?

HPV can be spread through genital contact, oral sex, vaginal sex, or anal sex, even when the infected partner has no signs or symptoms. A person can have HPV even if years have passed since he or she had sexual contact with an infected person. Most infected persons do not realize they are infected or that they are passing the virus on to a sex partner. Very rarely, a pregnant woman with genital HPV can pass HPV to her baby during delivery.

### Who is at risk for HPV?

HPV is a common virus that is passed from one person to another through direct skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity. Most sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives, though most will never even know it. HPV infection is most common in people in their late teens and early 20s.

### How do I know if I have HPV?

Most people with HPV have no symptoms, but if symptoms are present, see your doctor. Getting regular pap smears for women is important as abnormal results might prompt your doctor to do an HPV test.

## How is HPV treated?

There is no treatment for the virus itself, but there *are* treatments for the diseases that HPV can cause, like genital warts and cervical cancer.

## How can HPV be prevented?

There are several ways that people can lower their chances of getting HPV:

- Vaccines can protect males and females against some of the most common and most cancer-causing types of HPV. These vaccines are given in three shots. It is important to get all three doses to get the best protection. The vaccines are most effective when given before a person's first sexual contact, when he or she could be exposed to HPV. The vaccines are recommended for 11 and 12 year-old **boys and girls**. They can also be given to males and females 13 through 26 years of age who did not get any or all of the shots when they were younger. These vaccines can also be given to children as young as 9 years of age.
- People can also lower their chances of getting HPV by being in a faithful relationship with one partner; limiting their number of sex partners; and choosing a partner who has had no or few prior sex partners. But even people with only one lifetime sex partner can get HPV.
- For those who choose to be sexually active, condoms may lower the risk of HPV. But HPV can infect areas that are not covered by a condom - so condoms may not *fully* protect against HPV.

See your doctor to decide if you need a vaccine against HPV.

All information presented is intended for public use. More information on HPV can be found at:

- <http://www.cdc.gov/std/HPV/STDFact-HPV.htm>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/acip-recs/vacc-specific/hpv.html>