



Human Papillomavirus HPV

What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

Human papillomavirus virus (HPV) is a common virus that can cause cancers later in life. Nearly everyone who is sexually active and has not been vaccinated will be infected by HPV at some time in their lives without realizing it. There are more than 200 different types of HPV. Some HPVs cause warts on the hands and feet. Other HPVs are spread through sexual activities and may cause genital warts and infections. These types of HPV may also lead to cancers such as cervical, penile, or anal. Other HPV infections can cause cancers of the head and neck.

What are the symptoms?

Most people who are infected with HPV do not have any noticeable symptoms and infections go away by themselves. A small number of people develop genital warts.

How is HPV spread?

HPV is spread through direct skin-to-skin contact during sexual touching and unprotected vaginal, oral, or anal sex with someone who has HPV.

How is HPV diagnosed?

The Pap test is the most common test for detecting HPV infection and abnormal cells on the cervix in females.

Genital warts can be diagnosed by your health-care provider based on your medical history and a physical examination.

How is HPV infection treated?

There is no cure against HPV, however your health care provider can provide you with information on the treatment options that are available for certain conditions.

Once you have the virus, it stays in your body until it is eventually cleared by your immune system.

A-Z DISEASE FACT SHEETS

Who is at risk of HPV infection?

You are more likely to get HPV if you:

- Have not had vaccines for HPV before becoming sexually active.
- Have unprotected sex (vaginal, oral, or anal) with an infected partner.
- Have more than one sex partner or your partner has had multiple sex partners.
- Have a weakened immune system that makes it hard for your body to fight off infection.
- You do not use condoms or dental dams every time you have sex.

How can HPV infection be prevented?

Get vaccinated.

HPV vaccines are safe and effective and can protect against diseases (including cancers) caused by HPV.

The vaccine is most effective if given before you are exposed to HPV (i.e., before you become sexually active). This is why the HPV vaccine is offered to New Brunswick children in Grade 7. Not all types of HPV are covered by the vaccines, so regular screening is still recommended even if you have been immunized.

Condoms can reduce some of the risk of getting HPV but they will not always cover the infected area as the virus can be anywhere on the genital or anal area. Use of dental dams during oral sex can also reduce the risk of HPV infection.

What is the public health response?

Contact your local sexual health clinic, or your primary care provider with any questions, for testing, or for further education about HPV. Public Health recommends that all sexually active New Brunswickers have testing for all sexually transmitted diseases at the same time and on a regular basis. When you “test for one, test for all” you will be tested for gonorrhoea, chlamydia, hepatitis, syphilis, the Human Papillomavirus (HPV), and HIV/AIDS.

A-Z DISEASE FACT SHEETS

Further Information

For additional information, contact your healthcare provider, your local Public Health office or Tele-Care at 811 or visit the government of New Brunswick STBBI website at:

www.gnb.ca/sexualhealth

Or the Public Health Agency of Canada website at: [Human Papillomavirus \(HPV\) - Canada.ca](http://HumanPapillomavirus(HPV)-Canada.ca)

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