

# HPV



**Human Papillomavirus (HPV)** is the name of a very common group of viruses which are transmitted through any skin-to-skin contact of the genital area. They do not cause any problems in most people, but infection with some high-risk types can cause genital warts or cancer.

HPV is not a sexually transmitted disease, but a group of viruses which almost all sexually active people will be infected with at some point in their lives. In 90% of cases the body controls the infection but persistent HPV infection with a high risk HPV type is associated with various different cancers. In 2019, HPV caused an estimated 620000 cancer cases in women and 70000 cancer cases in men.

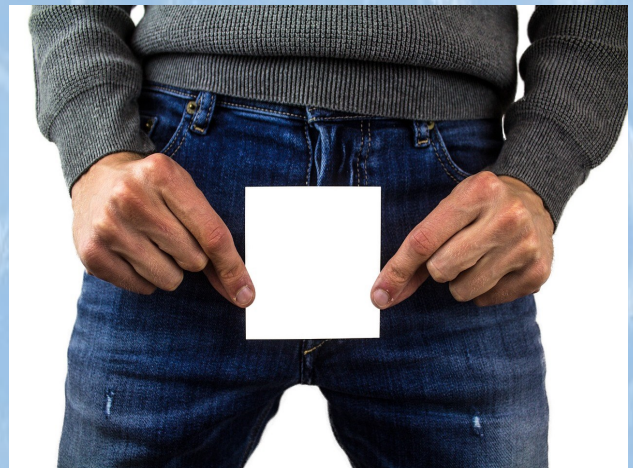
Although condoms help prevent HPV they do not offer total protection because they do not cover all the genital skin. Prophylactic vaccination against HPV can prevent the development of cancers caused by the HPV virus.

## SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

HPV does not usually cause any symptoms from an HPV infection and the immune system usually clears the infection from the body within a year or two with no lasting effects.

Sometimes the virus can cause growths or lumps around your genitals. These may be painful, itchy, bleed or cause swollen glands.

HPV infection that does not go away on its own can cause changes to cervical cells and other cells. These can then become pre-cancers and may become cancer if left untreated. Cervical cancer is the most common type of cancer caused by HPV and as a result the importance of receiving the cervical screening from the age of 25 years is highlighted. It usually takes 15-20 years for cervical cancer to develop after HPV infection.



The early changes in cervical cells and precancers mostly do not cause symptoms. Symptoms of cervical cancer may include bleeding between periods or after sexual intercourse or a foul-smelling vaginal discharge. These symptoms may be due to other diseases. People with these symptoms should speak to their healthcare provider.

**IF YOU HAVE SYMPTOMS OF HPV RING THE GP OR 111 FOR FURTHER ADVICE.**

## GET VACCINATED

Being vaccinated is the best way to prevent HPV infection, cervical cancer and other HPV-related cancers. Most people will need only one dose to be protected. This is usually given around the time children are in school year 8. To give the best protection, the vaccine should be given before a person becomes sexually active but it is never too late.



Cancers from HPV can be prevented with vaccines. The vaccine does not contain any live virus or DNA from the virus so it cannot cause any HPV related illnesses. The HPV vaccine is not used to treat HPV infections or diseases but instead to prevent the development of cancers.

If your child missed the vaccination at school, they should try and have it as soon as possible. Contact your school nurse, school immunisation team or GP practice to arrange an appointment. All males and females up to the age of 25 years are eligible to receive the HPV vaccine.

# 5 THINGS YOU MAY NOT KNOW

## 1. Some individuals are more at risk from HPV than others.

Evidence shows the prevalence of HPV is higher amongst individuals with weakened immune systems due to other infections such as HIV/AIDS, men who have sex with men, people with co-infections from STI's, people who receive immunosuppressive medications and children who have experienced sexual abuse.

## 2. There is currently no treatment for HPV

Many individuals believe HPV can be treated by antibiotics but this is not true. There is no treatment for HPV which is why cervical screening is so important as it can identify abnormal cells.

## 3. The HPV vaccine is not just for children.

The HPV vaccine is routinely offered in the UK to all young people aged 12 to 13 as part of the national childhood immunisation programme. And a catch-up HPV vaccine is available from the GP for young people under the age of 25 who missed out on it. It is also offered at specialist Sexual Health Services and HIV clinics. Other at risk categories of individuals (see fact 1 for further information) up to the age of 45 can get the vaccine if they attend these clinics. Having the vaccine at an early age will provide you with the best protection. You can also benefit from the vaccine if you've already been sexually active.

## 4. Most people do not know they have or have had HPV.

HPV does not usually cause any symptoms in the early stages, and most people will not even know if they've had it. The NHS cervical screening programme aims to detect any abnormal changes in the cervix, or other affected areas. Speak to a doctor or qualified health professional if you notice any new or unusual symptoms, such as changes in your regular menstrual cycle, abnormal growths around the genitals and pain in your lower back, lower tummy or hip bone.

## 5. Both men and women should receive the HPV vaccination.

HPV can be contracted by men and women. It can also cause different types of cancer in the different genders depending on specific strains of the HPV. As a result both men and women should receive the HPV vaccination.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

[Human papillomavirus \(HPV\) - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

[HPV vaccine - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

[Cervical screening - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

[Human papillomavirus and cancer \(who.int\)](http://who.int)

[NHS vaccinations and when to have them - NHS \(www.nhs.uk\)](http://www.nhs.uk)

[Information on the HPV vaccination from September 2023 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)