

*HPV facts*

# Did you get “it” yet?

Spread the  
**word**  
not the  
**disease**

hpvinfo.ca



SOGC

# What is HPV?

The Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common, highly contagious virus that is spread by skin-to-skin contact (penetration is not required) or during genital, anal or oral sex. There are more than 100 different types of HPV with at least 40 that cause genital warts and cancer.

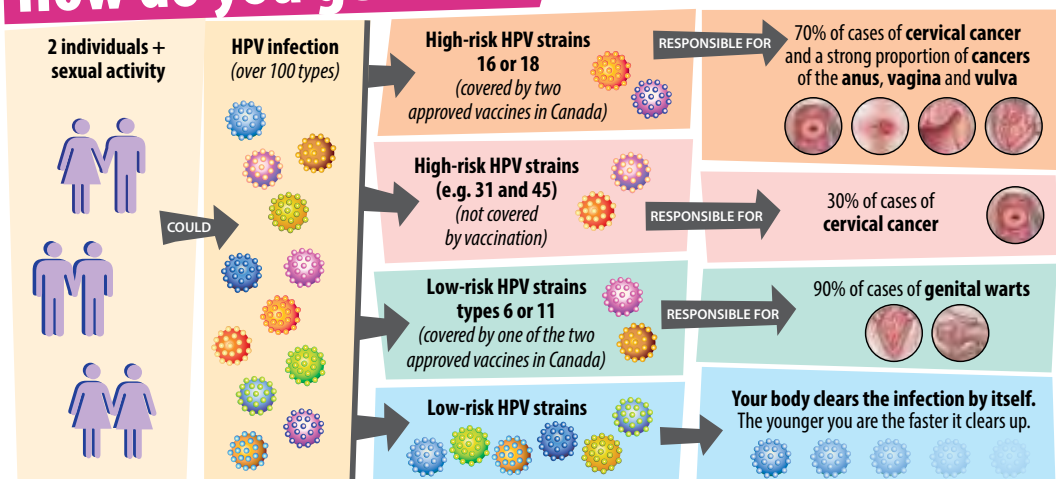
## What are genital warts?

Genital warts are ugly growths that look like small cauliflowers. They can be red or white, can sometimes cause itching or burning, and are found on or inside the sex organs in both women and men. If left untreated, they very rarely develop into cancer.

## What type of cancer does HPV cause?

In women, HPV has been linked to cancer of the **cervix**, **vulva**, and **vagina** and in men, to cancer of the **penis**. In both women and men, it has been linked to cancer of the **anus**, **head and neck** (mouth and throat).

## How do you get HPV?



## Who is at risk?

**Anyone who is sexually active** is at risk for HPV. **The highest rates of HPV infection are in young people aged 15 to 24.** If you are in this age group, you are more likely to get the virus.

# Is there a cure?

**There is **no cure** for the virus once you are infected.** There are treatments for the genital warts and cell changes caused by the virus, but these do not cure the virus itself.

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

It could be that you will never get HPV, or that you'll get it and your body will cure itself on its own. It is important to know that **almost 8 out of 10 Canadians will get HPV in their lifetimes.** Since HPV infections often have no signs or symptoms, you may not be able to tell if you or your partner are infected.

## *How do I protect myself?*

Condoms are a good way to protect yourself from many kinds of sexually transmitted infections. Use them consistently. **But when it comes to HPV, a condom does not provide full protection.** You can still get HPV from infected skin not covered by the condom.

## *What does a Pap test do?*

It detects cell changes in the cervix before they have time to turn into cancer. **The SOGC recommends you have your first Pap test by age 21,** and then as often as your health-care professional recommends.

## *Is there anything more I can do?*

**Vaccines exist and are 99% effective** at preventing the HPV types responsible for 90% of genital warts, 70% of cervical cancers, and a proportion of cancers of the anus, vagina and vulva.

## *Who can be vaccinated?*

In Canada, vaccination is approved for females aged 9-45 and males aged 9-26.

# Did you know?

- HPV, HIV and herpes are different viruses that can affect you differently. The one thing they have in common is that they are spread from person to person through sexual contact—they are all sexually transmitted infections.
- Any person who has sexual contact with another person can get HPV. You may be at risk even if you have only one partner because your partner may have had other partners in the past.
- Vaccination works best before you become sexually active because you have not yet been exposed to any types of HPV preventable by the vaccines.
- You can be vaccinated if you are already sexually active or have already had an HPV infection because you probably have not been exposed to all types of HPV that you can be protected against.
- **Vaccination does not mean you cannot get pregnant. You still need to use birth control.**

## **Did you get “it” yet?**

**Don't let “it” be HPV.**

**Get the *knowledge* you need.**

**Get your *Pap test*.**

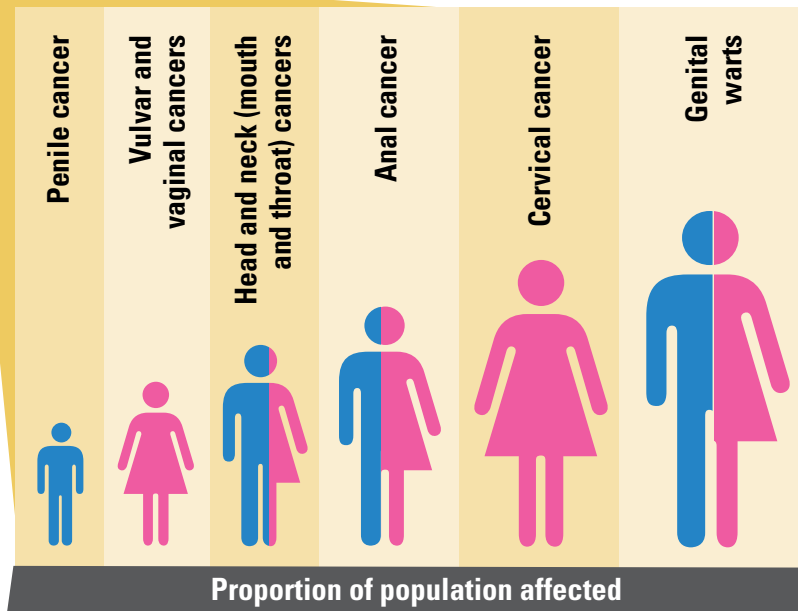
**Get the *vaccination* against HPV.**

**To learn more about HPV,  
visit [HPVinfo.ca](http://HPVinfo.ca).**

# Cancers and warts that can be caused by HPV



hpvinfo.ca



## Genital Warts



The wart that you may get on your hands or under your feet is not the type that is being referred to here. We are talking about **genital warts**. In women, they can be found on the vulva, vagina, cervix, pubis, thighs or in and around the anus. In men, they can be found on the penis, scrotum, pubis, thighs or in and around the anus.

There may be one or many warts that you can see or feel. They may look like small, red or white cauliflowers. They may be flat or feel like small raised bumps. Although the warts are unsightly, most of them are painless but can sometimes cause burning or itching. Genital warts are often the only sign that someone has an HPV infection. In fact, genital warts are the most common sign of HPV in men.

Some studies have shown that 2 out of 3 people who have sexual contact with a person who has genital warts will develop genital warts within one to eight months of being exposed. These warts are considered a chronic infection, which means that once you are infected, you can develop warts at any time, for the rest of your life.

A health-care professional can remove genital warts by using chemicals, laser surgery or freezing with liquid nitrogen or can boost your immune system to develop resistance against the HPV virus. However, that does not mean that you are cured of HPV, that the warts won't return, or that you can't spread the virus to your sexual partners or newborns.

The risk of getting genital warts increases as your number of sexual partners increases, if your partners were promiscuous, or if you smoke.

The two HPV types responsible for 90% of the cases of genital warts are HPV 6 and 11.

Vaccination can help prevent the incidence of genital warts.

## Cervical Cancer



The cervix is the lower opening of the uterus. **Cervical cancer**, or cancer of the cervix, is almost exclusively caused by HPV and is estimated to be the second most frequent cancer in women aged 20-44 after breast cancer. In Canada, about 1,500 women are diagnosed each year and 400 die from this type of cancer.

A Pap test, or Pap smear, is a simple screening method that detects cell changes on your cervix. When abnormal cervical cells are found early, they can often be treated effectively before these changes become dangerous. If left untreated for several years, abnormal cells can develop into cervical cancer.

If the Pap test results indicate that abnormal cells were found, the first step is to have a colposcopy. This procedure allows the gynaecologist or colposcopist to examine your cervix by using a special instrument (colposcope) that shines a light on your cervix and magnifies it, like looking through binoculars.

Depending on the result, a control visit or treatment can be recommended. Should a treatment be required, your doctor may suggest cryosurgery, laser surgery or a LEEP procedure to remove the affected cells. Cryosurgery freezes cells off, laser surgery burns or vaporizes the cells off, and LEEP (Loop Electrosurgical Excision Procedure) removes the cells using a wire loop.

The four HPV types most commonly associated with cervical cancer are HPV 16, 18, 31 and 45.

Vaccination can help prevent the incidence of cervical cancer.

## Vulvar and Vaginal Cancers



## Penile Cancer



The vulva is the outer part of the female genitals. It includes the opening of the vagina, the outer lips and the inner lips. It extends upward to the clitoris and downward to the perineum.

**Vulvar and vaginal cancers** are more rare types of cancers representing approximately 3% of all gynaecologic cancers, but the number of women affected is increasing. There are two types of vulvar cancer. One is associated with HPV infection and tends to occur in younger women. The other is associated with vulvar skin disease (such as lichen sclerosus) and is more frequently found in older women.

Often, there are no signs or symptoms. If there are, they can appear as itching or burning that does not go away, pain in the pelvic area, abnormal vaginal bleeding, difficulty urinating and/or painful intercourse. The Pap test does not screen for vulvar or vaginal cancers.

Men can get cancer of the penis, just as women can get vulvar and vaginal cancers.

**Penile cancer** is a more rare type of cancer representing less than one percent of cancers in men.

Generally, penile cancer affects the head or foreskin of the penis rather than the shaft of the penis. Signs and symptoms can be a lump or ulcer on the penis. Growths can be raised, wart-like or flat and can be painful and inflamed. There may be itching and burning in the region as well.

For vulvar, vaginal, and penile cancers, treatment varies depending on how advanced the cancer is. It might include laser surgery, microsurgery, radiation therapy, and/or chemotherapy.

The two HPV types most commonly associated with vulvar and vaginal cancers are HPV 16 and 18.

Vaccination can help prevent the incidence of vulvar and vaginal cancers, but has not been clinically proven to prevent penile cancer.



## Head and Neck Cancer (mouth and throat)



## Anal Cancer



Oral cancer is a cancer of the mouth. It commonly involves the lips and tongue and may occur on the roof or floor of the mouth, cheek lining, or gums. **Head and neck cancer** includes cancer of the mouth as well as cancer of the nose, sinuses, salivary glands, throat, larynx and lymph nodes in the neck.

Head and neck (mouth and throat) cancers are usually associated with high tobacco and alcohol consumption but these numbers are going down while HPV related ones are going up. Head and neck (mouth

and throat) cancers are linked with sexual behaviour including the practice of oral sex with a person infected with HPV.

Some typical symptoms of head and neck (mouth and throat) cancers include a lump or a sore in the head and neck area that does not heal, a sore throat that does not go away, white or red patches in the mouth, difficulty swallowing, and a change or hoarseness in the voice.

Cancer of the anus is rare but increasing. **Anal cancer** is similar to cervical cancer because the skin of the inside of the anus is a lot like the skin of the cervix and the skin of the outside of the anus is very similar to the skin of the vulva.

The infection can cause warts around and inside the anus. Symptoms can include anal bleeding, difficulty passing stools, pain or lumps, itching or discharge. In the presence of signs and symptoms, an intra anal examination should be performed.

In the presence of signs and symptoms of head and neck (mouth and throat) or anal cancer, a health-care professional may recommend imaging tests and biopsies. Treatments may include laser surgery, microsurgery, radiation therapy and/or chemotherapy.

The HPV type most commonly associated with head and neck (mouth and throat) and anal cancers is HPV 16.

