

HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS INFECTION (HPV)

Written by U.S Immigration News
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At some point in time you may have heard someone mention the term, HPV. It is a virus that causes warts. Warts can be found on different places of the body. When it occurs on the hands, it is called common warts. HPV can also cause genital warts, which is the focus of our discussion. Before we continue, we need to know some facts from the Centers of Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) about HPV. According to the CDC, HPV is the most common sexually transmitted disease in the United States. At least 50 percent of sexually active people will have HPV at one time or the other in their lives. Currently, approximately 20 million people in the U.S have HPV.

Ques: My partner told me her doctor informed her that she has HPV. She has no complaints. Can this be true?

Ans: Yes. Many people infected with HPV have no symptoms. Others may have genital warts. The problem is that when people do not have obvious lesions, they can still infect their sexual contacts with the virus.

Ques: How do people get HPV?

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Ans: HPV is contracted through broken skin during sexual intercourse. It can also be transmitted during oral and anal sex. Very rarely is it transmitted during birth.

Ques: *Where in the body should I look out for warts?*

Ans: Warts can occur in several places on the body. Genital warts occur on the vulva, cervix, or in the vagina in females. In males, it can be on the penis and scrotum. In both sexes, it can also occur around the anus. For people who engage in oral sex, it can also occur in the mouth and in the throat.

Ques: *What is the real concern about getting infected with HPV?*

Ans: There are several types of HPV. Infection with high-risk types 16 and 18 have been associated with cancer of the cervix. In fact, most cancer of the cervix is associated with HPV infection. There are also types 6 and 11 that cause low-risk infection. Low and high risk refers to the changes the types of HPV cause to cells. Types 6 and 11 cause low-grade changes that tend to resolve in the cells of the cervix. Changes in the cells of the cervix are detected during a PAP test. Types 16 and 18 cause high-grade cellular changes, some of which progress to cancer of the cervix. HPV is also incriminated in cancers of the anus, genitals, mouth, and throat. Both the low and high-risk types can be transmitted from one person to another.

Ques: *Which groups of people have HPV the most?*

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Ans: Young sexually-active females aged 20-24 have the highest rate of infection. Males are not excluded from infection. The frequency in males may appear less because the virus is not routinely tested in males. The more sexual partners one has, the higher one's risk of getting infected with HPV. People whose immune system is weak like those infected with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency virus) are also prone to the infection.

Ques: *Is there a way to protect oneself from getting HPV?*

Ans: Practicing safe sex is one of the ways to protect yourself from getting infected. This means keeping a monogamous relationship and using condoms. Condoms, however, are not absolute in protecting against HPV as contact can still occur through uncovered areas.

Vaccines are available for both males and females. It is advisable to get vaccinated prior to any sexual activity.

Ques: *At what age can people get vaccines?*

Ans: There are two types of vaccines. Gardasil and Cervarix. Gardasil protects against HPV types 6, 11, 16, and 18. Cervarix protects against HPV types 16 and 18. The vaccines can be given to girls from age 11 to 12 as part of routine immunization schedules and from age 9 to about 26 in males.

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Ques: Can HPV be cured?

Ans: Genital warts are treatable, but HPV is not curable. Treatment of genital warts range from locally applied cream, to destroying the warts by various means such as freezing or electrocautery. Absence of the warts, however, does not mean the person is no longer infected.

Take Home Message

HPV is not curable and not everyone who has HPV will have visible warts. Protecting yourself is very important. Females should have a PAP test when HPV testing can also be done. Vaccines are available, so get vaccinated. Limiting your sexual partners will further reduce your risk.

This article is for your information only; it is not a replacement for medical advice from your doctor.

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