



Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and Genital Warts

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI). People with HIV are at high risk to have HPV.

There are many types of HPV. In a lot of people, the body will clear HPV with no treatment. Some types of HPV cause warts. Others cause changes in skin cells and cancers of the cervix, anus, head and neck.

Genital warts are single or grouped bumps in the groin area. They sometimes have the shape of a cauliflower.

Symptoms

Most people with HPV do not know they have it. Most men and some women will not have signs of the virus. The virus lives in the skin or the moist parts of the body.

Some people get genital warts that they cannot even see. Some get the type they can see. The warts are soft, moist, pink or flesh-colored. They can be raised or flat and either appear alone or in clusters. They also vary in size.

Causes of and Risk Factors

The HPV that causes genital warts spreads by genital contact. The warts show up weeks or months after someone has sex or contact with a person with HPV. Sometimes there are no warts. They may still have HPV. People with HIV are more likely to be infected with HPV. More sex partners increases the chance you will be exposed. Men that have sex with men may have anal warts or HPV around or in the anus. This can increase the risk of anal cancer.

In rare cases, a pregnant woman can pass HPV to her baby when she gives birth.

How to Know You Have HPV and Genital Warts

A doctor can see if you have genital warts.

Most women learn they have HPV from a Pap test that is not normal or an HPV test that looks for the virus in the cervical cells. A Pap test each year can prevent problems with cancer of the cervix.

Men can be tested for HPV with an anal pap smear that can look for abnormal cells and HPV.

Treatment

There is no way to get rid of the virus. Health problems caused by the HPV virus can be treated.

Your doctor can treat genital warts or have you take medication to treat it. Men with HIV are more likely to get severe genital warts that last a long time. These may be harder to treat.

If certain cancers are found early, they can also be treated. This is why it's important to do your Pap tests on time.

Prevention

The best way to avoid HPV is to not have genital contact with another person. A latex condom may lower the risk of HPV infection but it does not prevent it completely. If there is skin not covered by the condom, HPV can still spread.

There is an FDA-approved vaccine against the most risky types of HPV. It works best when given to boys or girls before they start to have sex. It can be given to people up to the age of 26.

For more information:

Contact your Registered Nurse Care Manager, or call PHP Nurse Advice Line at: (800) 797-1717.

