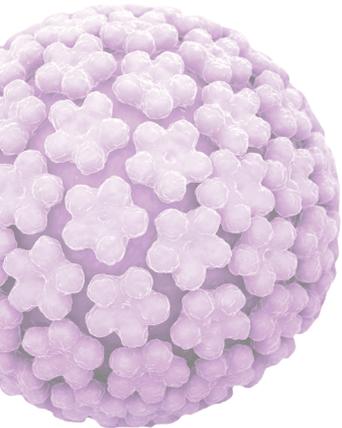


WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HPV

RISKS & PREVENTION

Human papillomavirus (HPV) affects everyone.

Raising awareness of HPV and learning more about how it is passed on, prevented and managed, can help to eliminate the virus and reduce the risk of developing certain cancers.



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WHY IS HPV PREVENTION IMPORTANT?

HPV infection is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) globally. It affects men and women and often has no visible symptoms which means it is very easy to get and to pass on.

HPV increases your risk of developing certain cancers; it is responsible for almost all cases of cervical and anal cancers and around one in three cases of mouth, throat and penile cancers globally.

Cervical cancer is the fourth most common cancer in women. For this reason, HPV screening and prevention programmes are usually focused on women, however the incidence of other HPV-related cancers in both women and men means that we all need to think about preventing HPV.

WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO PREVENT AGAINST HPV INFECTION?

Because HPV is mostly invisible and so easily passed on, the best way to prevent infection is through vaccination. There are more than 150 different strains of HPV. Vaccination protects against the types of HPV that are most likely to cause cancer. Some vaccines can also protect against genital warts.

CAN I GET THE HPV VACCINE?

HPV vaccination policy varies from country to country. Where it is available, it is generally licensed for use in 11 to 12 year-old girls and boys. In some countries, vaccination programmes start at age nine. Current research tells us that vaccinating teenagers offers the best protection from HPV-related cancer, because it is given before most young people are sexually active.

In some countries, adults may still be able to access HPV vaccinations, however the age limit of this varies from country to country and depends on local policy.

While the HPV vaccine is most effective when given before exposure to HPV, some countries now offer vaccination to anyone under the age of 45 in order to protect against the high-risk strains of HPV associated with cancer.

You might also be eligible for vaccination if you are at an increased risk of HPV infection. If you have an immunocompromising condition, for example HIV, or if you have received an organ transplant, you may be eligible.

Vaccination programmes in some countries also offer the HPV vaccine to transgender people up until 45 years old.

HOW IS THE VACCINE GIVEN AND ARE THERE ANY SIDE EFFECTS?

In teenagers under 15 years old, the vaccine is normally given in two doses, six months apart. Teenagers aged between 15 and 18 years old will require three doses of the vaccine.

It is important that you complete the vaccination programme and receive the required number of doses of the vaccine in order for it to offer maximum protection.

HPV vaccines are tested in clinical studies to make sure they are safe to be given to humans. They are regarded as being very safe and are not thought to cause significant side effects, or carry serious health risks. However, like any vaccine or medicine, the HPV vaccine does not come without risk and has the potential to cause side effects the most common of which include:



SWELLING OR ITCHING AROUND THE VACCINATION SITE

This usually disappears a few days following vaccination.



HEADACHE



FEVER (GREATER THAN 102.0 F/38.0 C)

The potential side effects of HPV vaccine are generally mild, however in very rare cases the vaccine can cause an allergic reaction. Any side effects should be reported as soon as possible.

When participating in any vaccination programme it is important to be aware of the health benefits of the vaccine versus any potential side effects. The benefits of vaccination against HPV are thought to far outweigh the risks in terms of reducing the risk of developing HPV-related cancers. Specific questions about HPV vaccination and its safety should be discussed with local healthcare providers.

DOES THE VACCINE OFFER 100% PROTECTION FROM HPV?

Clinical studies known as follow-up studies have shown that the vaccine protects against HPV infection for at least 10 years, and could last for many more decades. It is estimated that HPV vaccination can prevent 90% of HPV-related cancers. Specifically, HPV infections which cause most types of HPV-related cancers and genital warts, have dropped by 71% in teen girls.

It is important to understand that while vaccination and screening programmes do not offer 100% protection from HPV infection 100% of the time, they have significantly reduced the spread of HPV and HPV-related cancers.

DOES VACCINATING TEENAGERS NOT JUST ENCOURAGE THEM TO HAVE SEX EARLIER?

There is good evidence to show that vaccination before sexual contact is most effective in reducing the risk of adult cancer. A lot of research has been done to assess whether or not vaccinating teenagers against HPV is linked to an earlier onset of sexual contact and there is very little evidence from studies to suggest this is the case.

ARE THERE OTHER WAYS THAT I CAN PREVENT HPV?

It is almost impossible to entirely prevent HPV because it is so common, does not usually cause symptoms and most people don't know they have it. It is estimated that 80% of sexually active people will get at least one HPV infection at some point in their lives.

Although you can't completely protect against getting HPV, there are several ways in which you can reduce your risk of HPV and HPV-related cancers.



CONDOMS

Although condoms don't completely protect against HPV during sex because they only partially cover the skin on the genital tract, regular condom use 100% of the time reduces the risk of spreading HPV by about 70%. Less frequent use means less protection.



SCREENING

HPV infects men as well as women and also increases their cancer risk. However, the only current HPV screening programme is for cervical screening for women. While this has successfully reduced the global incidence of cervical cancer, it does not eliminate the spread of HPV and more needs to be done to ensure that all people are protected and aware of other HPV-related cancers.



EARLY DETECTION

It is not always possible to detect HPV early because it often does not cause any symptoms. However, symptoms such as genital warts, or sexual contact with someone who has HPV, should be discussed with local healthcare providers as soon as possible in order to seek treatment where possible.

It is also important to be aware of the symptoms of different forms of cancer that are caused by HPV and to seek early medical advice if you have any concerns.

For more information about HPV screening and managing HPV, download the information sheet on **"What You Need to Know About HPV: HPV & Cancer"** from askabouthpv.com.

ARE THERE ANY OTHER RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH HPV-RELATED CANCER?

There are several risk factors which, as well as HPV infection, can increase the risk of developing HPV-related cancers, such as:



HIV

HPV infection is thought to be about six times higher in people with HIV/AIDS. People with HIV/AIDS can be immunocompromised which means that their immune system is less able to fight off infection and they might be more susceptible to HPV infection. Women living with HIV infection are at an increased risk of developing cervical cancer. Control of HIV infection is also very important to control HPV infection and its side effects.



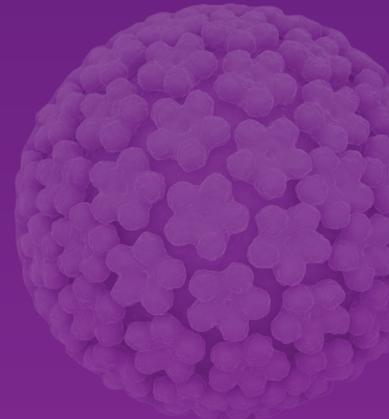
SMOKING

Some studies have shown that HPV is more common in smokers compared to non-smokers. This is not because smoking causes cervical cancer as such, but that people who smoke are less able to fight off HPV infection which can increase the risk of developing HPV-related cancers.



ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES

There is some evidence to suggest that long-term users of oral contraceptives, such as the contraceptive pill, can slightly increase the risk of developing cervical cancer for women who already have HPV. However, evidence from clinical studies is mixed and other factors have to be considered such as whether the broader benefits of (oral) hormonal contraception outweigh the slight increased risk of cervical cancer.



TO STOP HPV, START TALKING!

Possibly the best way to prevent HPV from spreading and reduce the incidence of HPV-related cancers is through talking about HPV. Raising awareness of the virus and talking about it with sexual partners and healthcare professionals can reduce the spread of HPV and prevent more people developing HPV-related cancers.

For more information about HPV and its related conditions visit askabout HPV.com where you download additional information resources on HPV.

