



## Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Infection

### What is HPV Infection?

HPV is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs). There are more than 100 types of HPV. Two types cause 70 per cent of cancer of the cervix in women. Another 2 types cause 90 per cent of genital warts in women and men.

### How is HPV spread?

HPV is spread by skin-to-skin contact from one person to another during oral, vaginal or anal sexual activity. Sexual intercourse is not necessary to get infected with HPV.

HPV can infect all of the genital area and surrounding skin. This includes the vagina, cervix, rectum, penis, vulva, and anus. It is possible to have more than one type of HPV infection at the same time.

### What are the symptoms of HPV?

Most people do not show any signs or symptoms of an HPV infection, and they can pass HPV onto others without knowing it.

### How common is HPV infection?

Three out of 4 sexually active women will get at least 1 HPV infection at some time in their lives. The more sexual partners you have, the higher your risk of spreading the virus and getting an HPV infection.

### What are the risks of HPV infection?

Most women who have an infection of HPV in the cervix clear the infection within 2 years. But when it does not clear, cells in the cervix that are infected with HPV can become cancerous within 1 to 20 years.

### Every year in BC:

- 150 women will get cervical cancer.
- 40 women will die from the disease.
- 6,000 women will develop high-risk changes to the cervix, which are precancerous.
- 10,000 invasive procedures will be done to stop cancer of the cervix from developing.

### What is the treatment for HPV?

There is no treatment, but specific types of HPV infection can be prevented using the HPV vaccine. Girls and women are best protected when they get the HPV vaccine before they become sexually active.

The HPV vaccine is recommended for girls and women between the ages of 9 and 26 years before they come in contact with HPV. The vaccine prevents HPV infection but it does not get rid of it once the infection occurs.

It is important for women to get regular Pap tests once they become sexually active because the HPV vaccine does not protect against all cancers of the cervix.

## Who should get the HPV vaccine?

Starting in the 2008-2009 school year, HPV vaccine will be provided free to girls in grades 6 and 9 in BC.

The vaccine may also benefit women who are sexually active and have not been infected with HPV.

For women not covered by the school-based program, please talk to your doctor.

## How can I reduce the risk of HPV?

- Get the HPV vaccine.
- Always use a condom with sexual activity.
- Delay the start of sexual activity.

## For more information

For more information, see the following HealthLink BC Files:

[#101b Human Papillomavirus \(HPV\) Vaccine Grade 6 and 9 Program](#)

[#08k Genital Warts](#)

[#08C Pelvic Inflammatory Disease \(PID\)](#)



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