

Facts about the HPV Vaccine

A vaccine is available that protects against many different types of HPV. The vaccine (brand name Gardasil) protects against the types of HPV that are most known to cause cancer and as well as the types of HPV that cause most genital warts. The vaccine is available for everyone between the ages of 9 and 45. Regular Pap tests are still important for women and people with a cervix and a vagina, since the vaccines don't protect against ALL types of HPV.

It's best to vaccinate children when they are 11 to 12 years old. It's important for children to get the vaccine before they start having sex—because they haven't yet been exposed to HPV. The vaccine doesn't protect people who have already been infected.

Some insurance plans and federal or state programs offer the vaccine at low cost or for free. Ask your doctor or dial 2-1-1 to find an immunization clinic.



How can I protect myself?

- **Use a condom every time you have sex.** Condoms can protect the covered areas from infection. Be sure that you know how to use them the right way.
- **Limit your number of partners.** The more people you have sex with, the greater your chances of getting HPV and other STIs.
- **Get regular Pap tests.** These can find changes in the cervix caused by HPV and help to prevent cervical cancer.
- **Take charge of your health.** Pap tests and HPV tests aren't always done during pelvic exams. Talk with your doctor about which tests are right for you. Follow up with the visits and care that they recommend.
- **Get the HPV vaccine.** Talk with your doctor to see if it's right for you. Dial 2-1-1 to find an immunization clinic.
- **Don't smoke.** Smoking increases your risk of getting HPV and cervical cancer. For help quitting, call the California Smoker's Hotline at 1-800-NO BUTTS.

Need more information?

STD Hotline: 1-800-758-0880

Website: publichealth.lacounty.gov/dhsp

Do you know about HPV?

Facts about Human Papillomavirus



What's HPV?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus that you can get by having sex with someone who has it. It's not the same as HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) or HSV (Herpes Simplex Virus). HPV is known to cause health problems including genital warts and cancers.

HPV is the most common Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) in the United States. There are about 100 types of HPV, and most sexually active adults will get one or more types at some time in their lives. HPV is spread through the rubbing of genital skin. **This means that you can get it through vaginal sex, anal sex, oral sex and even foreplay.**

What are the signs of HPV?

HPV often shows no signs and goes away on its own without causing problems. Most people who get HPV don't even know they have it because their immune system fights it off and clears the virus from the body.

There is no test to find out a person's "HPV status." Also, there is no approved HPV test to find HPV in the mouth or throat. **There are HPV tests that can be used to screen for cervical or anal cancers, and these are known as Pap tests.**

Will HPV make me sick?

HPV won't make most people sick since the body takes care of the infection without ever showing any signs. However, some types of HPV will cause genital warts and other types of HPV can cause **cervical** and other [cancers](#) including cancer of the **vulva, vagina, penis, anus**, or back of the **throat**, including the base of the **tongue** and **tonsils** (called [oropharyngeal cancer](#)).

"Low-Risk" types of HPV can cause visible warts in and around the genitals. They can also cause abnormal Pap tests, but don't cause cancer. There is treatment to make these visible warts go away. Over time, the virus goes away too. But this can take two years or more.

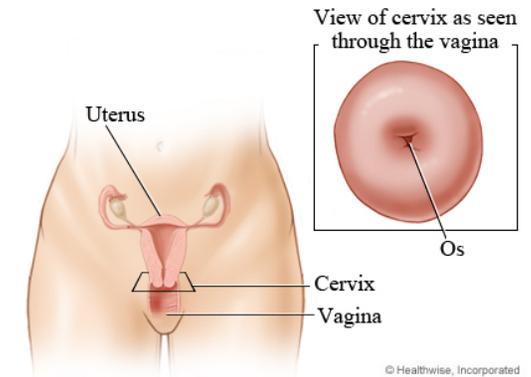
"High-Risk" types of HPV can cause normal cells to turn abnormal. Most of the time, these cells go back to normal. But if HPV stays for many years without being cleared, these abnormal cells may turn into cervical and other cancers. These are found by Pap tests, and can be treated and cured.

If you have HPV, it's important to get regular Pap tests. You can also lower your risk of developing cervical and other cancers by not smoking.

To find a free or low-cost cervical Pap test,
call the Office of Women's Health:
1-800-793-8090

Can I prevent HPV-related cancer?

Yes. Women and people with a cervix and a vagina can get regular Pap tests that will find early signs of cervical cancer. Cervical cancer is curable if found early.



Most women and people with a cervix and a vagina should start getting the Pap test at age 21 years, and then every three years after that. If you are a person between the ages 30 and 65 years you may be able to do a blood test in combination with your cervical Pap test and do this approach every 5 years instead. Ask your doctor for more details.

Anal Pap tests can be done every 1-3 years depending on your risk. **Talk to your doctor to see if an anal Pap test is right for you.**