

HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV) DISEASE AND COLLEGE STUDENTS

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. There are more than 40 HPV types that can infect the genital areas of males and females. These HPV types can also infect the mouth and throat. Several types of cancer are associated with HPV. Almost all cervical cancer is caused by HPV. And HPV are associated with other anal/genital area cancers and warts. Most people will not develop any signs or symptoms of HPV infection. In 90% of cases, the body's immune system clears HPV naturally within two years. But there is no way to know which people who get HPV will go on to develop cancer or other health problems.

How is HPV infection spread?

HPV is passed on through genital contact, most often during vaginal and anal sex. HPV may also be passed on during oral sex and genital-to-genital contact. Most infected persons do not realize they are infected or that they are passing the virus on to a sex partner. It is also possible to get more than one type of HPV.

Who is at risk for HPV?

Anyone can get HPV, as it is related to sexual behavior. The number of sexual partners, your age of first intercourse and past history of your partner's sexual history (how many previous partners they had) may impact your likelihood of acquiring the virus.

How can people prevent HPV?

There are several ways that people can lower their chances of getting HPV:

- Vaccines can protect males and females against some of the most common types of HPV. HPV vaccines are given in three doses over six months. It is important to get all three doses to get the best protection. The vaccines are most effective when given before a person's first sexual contact, when he or she could be exposed to HPV.
- For those who choose to be sexually active, condoms may lower the risk of HPV infection. To be most effective, they should be used with every sex act, from start to finish. Condoms may also lower the risk of developing HPV-related diseases, such as genital warts and cervical cancer. But HPV can infect areas that are not covered by a condom, so condoms may not fully protect against HPV.
- People can also lower their chances of getting HPV by being in a faithful relationship with one partner; limiting their number of sex partners; and choosing a partner who has had no or few prior sex partners. But even people with only one lifetime sex partner can get HPV. And it may not be possible to determine if a partner who has been sexually active in the past is currently infected. That's why the only sure way to prevent HPV is to avoid all sexual activity.

What about the vaccine?

HPV vaccines are available for males and females to protect against the types of HPV that most commonly cause health problems. Two vaccines are available to protect females against the types of HPV that cause approximately 70% of all cervical cancers. One of the vaccines also protects against the two strains of HPV that cause approximately 90% of all genital warts cases.

A vaccine, like any other medicine, is capable of causing serious problems, such as allergic reactions. Anyone who has ever had a life-threatening allergic reaction to any component of the vaccine, including yeast, or to a previous dose of HPV vaccine should not get the vaccine. HPV vaccine is not recommended for pregnant women. If you are moderately or severely ill, you should wait until you feel

better to receive the vaccine. The most common reactions to receiving the vaccine are pain, redness or swelling at the injection site, mild fever, headache and fainting.

If a college student decides to be vaccinated, they (or their parents if they are less than 18 years of age) should contact their health care provider or the college student health care center where they will be attending to inquire about receiving the vaccine.

For more information about the HPV vaccine, you may access the “Vaccine Information Statement” (VIS) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Web site:

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/hpv-gardasil.html>

<http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/hpv-cervarix.html>

Adapted from material on the CDC Web site: <http://www.cdc.gov>.