Fact:

At least 50% of sexually active people will get genital HPV.

Most won't know they have it.
Learn about this common virus.

HPV
Common Infection.
Common Reality.™

Genital HPV is common in men and women

Genital human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted virus in the United States. It is passed on through genital contact (such as vaginal and anal sex).

Why haven't more people heard of it?

Genital HPV is not a new virus. But ***many people are not aware of it because it usually has no symptoms and goes away on its own***—without causing any health problems.

How common is genital HPV?

At least 50% of sexually active people will have genital HPV at some time in their lives.

Research shows that genital HPV is passed on by:	No research shows that genital HPV is passed on by:
• Genital contact with a person who has genital HPV, including: — Vaginal sex with a person who has genital HPV — Anal sex with a person who has genital HPV	• Toilet seats • Kissing on the mouth, hugging, or holding hands • Poor personal hygiene • Sharing food or utensils • Swimming in pools or hot tubs

Who gets genital HPV?

Anyone who has ever had genital contact with another person can have genital HPV. Both men and women can get it—and pass it on—without even realizing it. Since the virus can be "silent" for a long time, a person can have genital HPV even if years have passed since he or she had sex.

What makes a person more likely to get genital HPV?

Most sexually active people get genital HPV. You're more likely to get genital HPV if you have sex at an early age, multiple sex partners, or a sex partner who has had multiple partners.

Genital HPV does not cause health problems for most people

There are many different types of genital HPV, which fall into two main groups. The first group can cause genital warts ("low-risk" HPV types), and the second group can cause cervical cancer in women ("high-risk" HPV types).

Genital HPV is ***not*** the same as HIV or herpes (herpes simplex virus, HSV). While these are all viruses that can be sexually transmitted, these viruses do not cause the same symptoms or health problems.

What does “low-risk” HPV mean?

Some genital HPV types are referred to as “low-risk” because they do not put people at risk for cancer. Low-risk types of HPV can cause mild changes in a woman’s cervix. These changes do not lead to cancer. They are harmless and temporary.

Sometimes low-risk HPV types can also cause visible changes in the genital area, called genital warts. Genital warts are growths or bumps in the genital areas of men and women. They usually are painless. They may be raised, flat, small or large, and single or multiple.

Many treatment options are available for genital warts. But even after the warts are treated, the virus (genital HPV) may remain and be transmitted. For this reason, it is not clear if treating genital warts lowers a person’s chance of giving genital HPV to a sex partner or not. If left untreated, genital warts may go away, remain unchanged, or increase in size or number. They will not turn into cancer. It is not fully known why low-risk HPV causes genital warts in some cases, but not in others.

What does “high-risk” HPV mean?

The second group of genital HPV types is known as “high-risk” because these types are linked to cervical cancer. High-risk types have also been linked to other less common genital cancers, such as anal cancer. Usually, high-risk HPV types do not cause health problems. In some people, high-risk HPV types can linger and cause cell changes. Sometimes, these cell changes can lead to cancer over time, if they are not treated. It is only persistent, high-risk HPV (that doesn’t go away for years) that puts people at risk for cancer.

Does high-risk HPV mean cancer?

No. High-risk HPV is not the same as cancer. High-risk HPV types *can cause* cancer if they persist and change cells over many years. Cervical cancer in women is the most serious health problem caused by high-risk HPV.

The good news is ***cervical cancer is highly preventable with regular Pap tests and follow-up.*** **A vaccine is also available now, which protects against most cervical cancers.**

Genital HPV and women

It is important to know the link between genital HPV and cervical cancer—and what steps to take to prevent cervical cancer.

How can women prevent cervical cancer?

There are two ways to prevent cervical cancer:
(1) Females ages 9 to 26 years old should get an HPV vaccine, AND
(2) women should get regular Pap tests.

(1) The new HPV vaccine protects against four HPV types, which together cause 70% of cervical cancers and 90% of genital warts. The vaccine is given through a series of three shots over a six-month period. It is recommended for 11- to 12-year-old girls, and it can be given to girls as young as 9. The vaccine is also recommended for 13- to 26-year-old females who have not yet received or completed the vaccine series.

Females who have not yet had sex will benefit most from getting the vaccine, since they are unlikely to have been infected with HPV. Young, sexually active females may also benefit from the vaccine, since few will have been infected with all four of the vaccine's HPV types by age 26. If you are 26 years of age or younger, ask your doctor if this vaccine is right for you.

(2) The Pap test looks for cell changes caused by genital HPV. It finds cell changes early—so the cells can be treated before they turn into cancer. This test can also find cancer in its early stages so it can be treated before it becomes life threatening. Cervical cancer is rare in the United States because of widespread Pap testing in this country.

Why should women—even those who got the HPV vaccine—get regular Pap tests?

The Pap test is the best way to screen for cervical cancer. Getting regular Pap tests can save a woman's life. Even women who got the HPV vaccine when they were younger need regular Pap tests, since the vaccine does not protect against all cervical cancers. More than half of the women in the United States who develop cervical cancer have never or rarely been screened with a Pap test.

(Genital HPV and women *continued*)

What if my Pap test is abnormal?

Don't panic. Abnormal Pap tests are common. But ***women should follow up with their health care provider*** when they get an abnormal result. This way, a woman's health care provider can find and treat cell changes in the cervix (caused by genital HPV) to be sure they do not turn into life-threatening cervical cancer. Or, the health care provider may simply need to keep a close watch to be sure these cell changes do not get worse.

What about an HPV test for women?

Health care providers may use an HPV test for women who get an unclear (borderline) Pap test result to help direct next steps in cervical cancer screening.

For women over 30, this test can also be used with the Pap test, as part of routine cervical cancer screening. This test is only approved for use as part of cervical cancer screening. You should talk with your health care provider to see if getting the HPV test along with the Pap test is right for you.

What's the difference between the Pap test and the HPV test?

The Pap test looks for abnormal cell changes on the cervix, which are usually caused by HPV. For this reason, women with abnormal Pap tests may be told that they have HPV. The HPV test is used to find HPV on the cervix. Doctors cannot treat HPV, but they *can* treat the cell changes that HPV causes. That's why the Pap test is the gold standard for cervical cancer screening.

Genital HPV and men

Genital HPV is common in men. However, it rarely causes serious health complications in heterosexual men. The most apparent result of HPV in men is usually genital warts, which can be seen with the naked eye.

The important thing to know is that men can have genital HPV with no symptoms and pass it on to their partners.

There is currently no approved HPV test for men. There also is no approved HPV vaccine for men. Studies are being done to find out if the vaccine works to prevent HPV infection and disease in males. When more information is available, this vaccine may be licensed and recommended for boys/men as well.

Do I need to know if I have genital HPV?

Because most people will have genital HPV at some time in their lives and it usually goes away on its own, there is no reason to be tested just to find out if you have genital HPV. However, it is very important to screen for the diseases that genital HPV can cause, such as cervical cancer in women.

Is there a treatment for genital HPV?

There is no treatment for the virus (genital HPV) itself, but a healthy immune system can usually fight off the virus on its own. There *are* treatments for the health problems that genital HPV can cause, such as genital warts, cervical cell changes, and cervical cancer.

Are there ways to reduce my chances of getting genital HPV?

As mentioned, a new vaccine can now protect females (ages 9 to 26) from four major types of HPV, which cause most cervical cancers and genital warts. The surest way to prevent genital HPV is not to have sex (abstinence).

If you decide to be sexually active, condoms may lower your chances of getting HPV, if used all the time and the right way. Condoms may also lower your chances of developing HPV-related diseases (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. You can also lower your risk by being in a mutually faithful relationship with someone who has had no or few sex partners. Finally, you can limit the number of partners you have and choose your partners carefully. The fewer partners your partner has had, the less likely he or she is to have HPV.

There's no blame, no shame about genital HPV

It is natural for people who learn they have genital HPV to want to know who gave it to them. But there is no way to know for sure. The virus is very common. A person can have genital HPV for a very long time before it is detected. If you have genital HPV, don't blame your current partner—or assume your partner is cheating. Genital HPV should not be seen as a sign that you or your partner is having sex outside of your relationship.

Understand HPV: Don't be alarmed, be informed

In summary, here are some important things to remember about genital HPV:

- Most sexually active people will have HPV at some time in their lives.
- HPV is usually harmless, but some types can cause genital warts. Other types can cause cervical cancer and other less common cancers.
- Women can prevent cervical cancer by getting regular Pap tests and follow-up.
- Females (ages 9 to 26) can also get an HPV vaccine that prevents most cervical cancers and genital warts.
- Currently, the HPV vaccine is only indicated for use in females. Studies are being done to find out if the vaccine is also safe and effective in males.
- It is important for both men and women to talk openly about genital HPV with their partners—so everyone is informed and able to make safe decisions about his or her health.

For more information about genital HPV,
call 1-800-CDC-INFO
or visit www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/