



HPV and Men



What is Genital Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?

Genital human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus. Most sexually active people in the United States (U.S.) will have HPV at some time in their lives. There are more than 40 types of HPV that are passed on during sex. These types can infect the genital areas of men, including the skin on and around the penis or anus.

■ What are the health problems caused by HPV in men?

Most men who get HPV (of any type) never develop any symptoms or health problems. But some types of HPV can cause genital warts. Other types can cause penile cancer or anal cancer. The types of HPV that can cause genital warts are not the same as the types that can cause penile or anal cancer. Anal cancer is not the same as colorectal cancer. Colorectal cancer is more common than anal cancer, but it is not caused by HPV.

■ How common are HPV-related health problems in men?

- About 1% of sexually active men in the U.S. have genital warts at any one time.
- Penile cancer is rare, especially in circumcised men. In the U.S., it affects about 1 in every 100,000 men. The American Cancer Society (ACS) estimated that about 1,530 men would be diagnosed with penile cancer in the U.S. in 2006.
- Anal cancer is also uncommon—especially in men with healthy immune systems. According to the ACS, about 1,900 men will be diagnosed with anal cancer in the U.S. in 2007.

Some men are more likely to develop HPV-related diseases than others:

- Gay and bisexual men are 17 times more likely to develop anal cancer than heterosexual men.
- Men with weak immune systems, including those who have human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), are more likely than other men to develop anal cancer. Men with HIV are also more likely to get severe cases of genital warts that are hard to treat.

■ What are the signs and symptoms?

Among men who do develop health problems, these are some of the signs to look for:

Signs of genital warts:

- One or more growths on the penis, testicles, groin, thighs, or anus.
- Warts may be raised, flat, or cauliflower-shaped. They usually do not hurt.
- Warts may appear within weeks or months after sexual contact with an infected person.

Signs and symptoms of anal cancer:

- Sometimes there are no signs or symptoms.
- Anal bleeding, pain, itching, or discharge.
- Swollen lymph nodes in the anal or groin area.
- Changes in bowel habits or the shape of your stool.

Signs of penile cancer:

- **First signs:** changes in color, skin thickening, or a build-up of tissue on the penis.
- **Later signs:** a growth or sore on the penis. It is usually painless, but in some cases, the sore may be painful and bleed.
- There may be no symptoms until the cancer is quite advanced.

■ How do men get HPV?

HPV is passed on through genital contact—most often during vaginal and anal sex. Since HPV usually causes no symptoms, most men and women can get HPV—and pass it on—without realizing it. People can have HPV even if years have passed since they had sex.

■ Is there a test for HPV in men?

Currently, there is no test designed or approved to find HPV in men. The only approved HPV test on the market is for women, for use as part of cervical cancer screening. There is no general test for men or women to check one's overall "HPV status." But HPV usually goes away on its own, without causing health problems. So an HPV infection that is found today will most likely not be there a year or two from now.

REMEMBER: HPV is very common in men and women. Most men with HPV will never develop health problems from it. Finding out if you have HPV is not as important as finding out if you have the diseases that it can cause. Scientists are still studying how best to screen for penile and anal cancers in men who may be at highest risk for those diseases (see below).

Is there a test to find genital warts?

Most of the time, you can see genital warts. Some doctors may use a vinegar solution to help find flat warts—but this test can sometimes wrongly identify normal skin as a wart.

Is there a test to screen for HPV-related cancers in men?

Screening tests can find early signs of disease in people who are not yet sick. Screening tests for penile or anal cancer are not widely recommended.

Some experts recommend yearly anal Pap tests for gay, bisexual, and HIV-positive men, since anal cancer is more common in these groups. This test can find abnormal cells in the anus that could turn into cancer over time. If abnormal cells are found, they can be removed. CDC does not recommend anal Pap tests because there is not enough research to show that removing abnormal anal cells actually prevents anal cancer from developing in the future. More studies are needed to understand if anal Pap tests and treatment of abnormal cells prevent anal cancer in men.

You can check for any abnormalities on your penis, scrotum, or around the anus. See your doctor if you find warts, blisters, sores, ulcers, white patches, or other abnormal areas on your penis—even if they do not hurt.

Is there a treatment or cure for HPV?

There is no treatment or cure for HPV. But there are ways to treat the health problems caused by HPV in men.

Genital warts can be treated with medicine, removed (surgery), or frozen off. Some of these treatments involve a visit to the doctor. Others can be done at home by the patient himself. No one treatment is better than another. But warts often come back within a few months after treatment—so several treatments may be needed. Treating genital warts may not necessarily lower a man's chances of passing HPV on to his sex partner. Because of this, some men choose not to treat genital warts. If they are not treated, genital warts may go away on their own, stay the same, or grow (in size or number). They will not turn into cancer or threaten your health.

Penile and anal cancers can be treated with new forms of surgery, radiation therapy, and chemotherapy. Often, two or more of these treatments are used together. Patients should decide with their doctors which treatments are best for them.

Are there ways to lower my chances of getting HPV?

Because HPV is so common and usually invisible, the only sure way to prevent it is not to have sex. Even people with only one lifetime sex partner can get HPV, if their partner was infected with HPV. Condoms (used all the time and the



right way) may lower your chances of passing HPV to a partner or developing HPV-related diseases. But HPV can infect areas that are not covered by a condom—so condoms may not fully protect against HPV.

I heard about a new HPV vaccine—can it help me?

The new HPV vaccine was developed to protect against most cervical cancers and genital warts. At this point, it is only licensed to be used in girls/women, ages 9-26 years. Studies are now being done to find out if the vaccine is also safe in men, and if it can protect them against genital warts and certain penile and anal cancers. The FDA will consider licensing the vaccine for boys and men if there is proof that it is safe and effective for them.

My partner has HPV...

What does it mean for my health?

Partners usually share HPV. If you have been with your partner for a long time, you probably have HPV already. Most sexually active adults will have HPV at some time in their lives. Men with healthy immune systems rarely develop health problems from HPV. But you should check regularly for any abnormalities on your penis. If you have a weak immune system or HIV, ask your doctor about checking for anal and penile cancers.

If your partner is new, condoms may lower your chances of getting HPV or developing HPV-related diseases. But not having sex is the only sure way to avoid HPV.

What does it mean for our relationship?

A person can have HPV for many years before it is found or causes health problems. So there is no way to know if your partner gave you HPV, or if you gave HPV to your partner. HPV should not be seen as a sign that you or your partner is having sex outside of your relationship.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Division of STD Prevention (DSTDP)
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
<http://www.cdc.gov/std/>

CDC-INFO Contact Center
1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)
Email: cdcinfo@cdc.gov

American Social Health Association (ASHA)
1-800-783-9877
www.ashastd.org