

A photograph of a man and a woman standing on a rocky shore at sunset. The woman is on the left, wearing a white long-sleeved top and dark pants. The man is on the right, wearing a red jacket and dark pants. They are looking at each other. The background shows the ocean and a sunset sky with a colorful mosaic border at the top.

Genital Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

At least 50% of sexually active women and men will get it. Most will not know they have it.

**Alaska Native
Women:
Learn what
HPV is,
and what
you can do to
protect yourself
from the possible
effects of HPV.**

HPV
Common Infection.
Common Reality.



What is genital human papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a common virus. There are about 40 types of HPV that can infect the genital areas (private or sex parts) of men and women. These viruses are passed on through sexual contact.

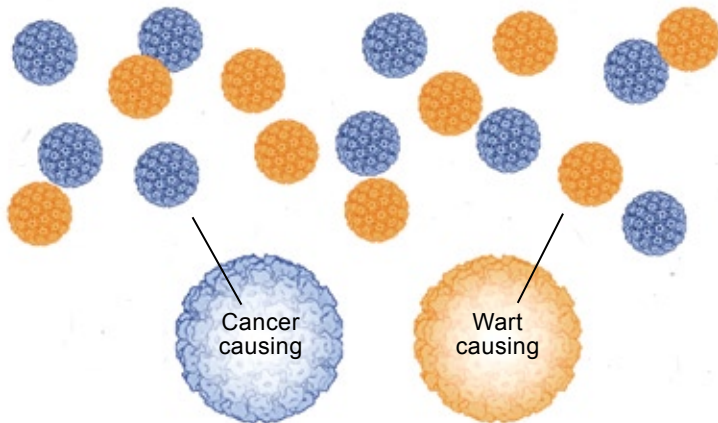
- ❖ Usually the body fights off HPV before it can cause health problems. But sometimes the body does not.
- ❖ HPV can cause health problems, such as:
 - Genital warts in both men and women. Warts are not life threatening, but can be emotionally hard for a person to deal with;
 - Cervical cancer in women;
 - Other less common cancers in men and women, like anal cancer.
- ❖ Most people with HPV do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected.



Genital HPV types are split into two categories:

- 1) wart-causing HPV
- 2) cancer-causing HPV

HPV



It is important to know that:

- ❖ Most of the time, people with any type of HPV will not develop either genital warts or cervical cancer.
- ❖ Genital warts will not turn into cancer, even if they are not treated.
- ❖ The cancer-causing HPV types have to stay on the cervix many years to cause cervical cancer.

Genital HPV is not the same as HIV or herpes.

H ow do people get HPV?

You can get HPV by having sexual contact—like vaginal and anal sex—with someone who has it.

- ❖ Any man or woman who has ever been sexually active can have HPV and pass it on to their partner.
- ❖ You can have HPV, even if years have passed since you were sexually active.

You **CANNOT** get HPV from:

- Toilet seats
- Kissing on the mouth, hugging, or holding hands
- Being unclean (bad hygiene)
- Sharing food or utensils
- Swimming in pools or hot tubs
- Family history (heredity)

Your partner may not show any signs of HPV. Most people get HPV—and pass it on—without even knowing it.



Is HPV more common in women or in men?

HPV is just as common in men and women. But HPV is less likely to cause serious health problems in men. Most men with HPV never get symptoms or health problems from it. There is no approved test for HPV in men.

Are HPV and related diseases more common in Native women than in other women in the U.S.?

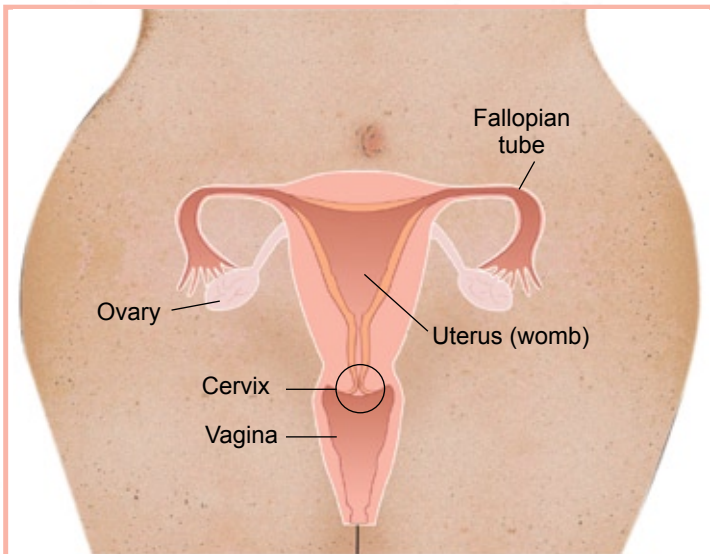
- ❖ HPV and genital warts are just as common in Alaska Native women as in women of other races/ethnicities.
- ❖ Cervical cancer is less common in Native women than in African-American and Hispanic women. But cervical cancer is more common in Native women than in white women. As more Native women take steps to prevent cervical cancer, fewer are getting this disease (see pages 7-10).



What is cervical cancer?

Cancer can grow on a woman's cervix the same way it can grow on other body organs.

The cervix is the opening of a woman's uterus (womb).



Cervical cancer can be prevented. It can also be treated when it is found early.

Cervical cancer often does not cause symptoms until it is advanced. So it is important to get a screening test, which can find problems early. (See page 9.)

How can HPV cause cervical cancer?

HPV can infect a woman's cervix and cause normal cells to become abnormal. If HPV goes away, cervical cells go back to normal. But if HPV stays on the cervix for many years, it can turn those cells into cancer over time.

Abnormal cells can be found with a screening test, called the Pap test.

Problems that are found early can be treated before they turn into cancer. That is why cervical cancer is the easiest female cancer to prevent.



How can HPV and its possible effects be prevented?

1. There is now an HPV vaccine that protects females from the types of HPV that most often cause cervical cancer and genital warts (see page 8.)
2. Women should get routine Pap tests to screen for cervical cancer (see page 9). Screening tests can find problems that can be treated before they become cancer.
3. Sexually active people should use condoms with every sex act. Condoms can lower your chances of getting HPV. They can also lower your chances of getting genital warts or cervical cancer. But HPV can infect areas that are not covered by a condom. So condoms may not fully protect against HPV.
4. Sexually active people should limit their number of partners. The more sex partners you have, the more likely you are to be with someone who has HPV. But HPV is so common that even people with only one partner can have it. So the only sure way to prevent HPV is to avoid sexual contact with others.

A new condom should be used with every sex act, every time you have sex. The condom should be put on properly *before* any sexual contact.

The HPV vaccine protects against most cervical cancers and genital warts.

The vaccine has been widely tested in girls and women. It is safe and has no serious side effects. The most common side effect is soreness in the arm.

- ❖ The vaccine is given in three doses over six months.
- ❖ The vaccine protects females from getting HPV. It does not cure those who already have HPV or HPV disease (like genital warts or cervical cancer).
- ❖ The HPV vaccine is recommended for 11 and 12 year-old girls. It is also recommended as a catch-up vaccine for girls and women, ages 13 through 26, if they did not get any or all of the shots when they were younger. Note: It can be given starting at age 9.
- ❖ The vaccine does not protect against all cervical cancers. So women who get vaccinated will still need regular Pap tests.
- ❖ Ask your clinic or doctor for information about programs that may help pay for the vaccine for girls ages 18 and younger. (Also, see "Resources," page 12.)

Protect the Circle of Life: Get vaccinated against cervical cancer. Tell your friends and female relatives about getting the HPV vaccine, too.

The HPV vaccine is one way to protect against cervical cancer.



Screening Tests Can Save Your Life!

The Pap test is a cervical cancer screening test. It checks for changes on your cervix so that problems can be found and removed before they turn into cancer.

An HPV test may also be used with the Pap test in certain cases (and where available). The HPV test looks for HPV, the virus that can cause cell changes on your cervix.

- ❖ Women should start getting Pap tests three years after they first have sex, or by age 21, whichever comes first.
- ❖ Women should get a Pap test at least once every three years.

For the Pap test, your health care provider will use a swab to collect cells from your cervix. Your cells will then be checked under a microscope for any problems.



You need regular Pap tests even if you:

- ❖ Feel healthy
- ❖ Have gone through the change of life (menopause)
- ❖ Are no longer having sex
- ❖ Are two-spirited (gay or lesbian)
- ❖ Got the HPV vaccine (remember that the vaccine does not protect against all cervical cancers)

More Alaska Native women are getting regular Pap tests. Now, fewer Alaskan Native women get cervical cancer.

Some reasons why Alaska Native women may not get Pap tests:

- ❖ Some may be embarrassed to get the test.
- ❖ Some may only see traditional healers.
- ❖ Some may not know where to get free or low-cost Pap tests.

Make an appointment today. Ask your sister, mother or a friend to go with you.

Remember: Pap tests can save your life! See page 12, for places where you can get a free Pap test.

Cervical cancer can be prevented and treated when problems are found early.

If a problem is found on your Pap or HPV test:

- ❖ It does not mean you have cervical cancer now.
- ❖ Follow up with your doctor for all recommended appointments and tests.

Is there a treatment for HPV?

There is no treatment for HPV (a virus). But there are treatments for the health problems that HPV can cause—like abnormal cervical cells, cervical cancer, and genital warts.

There is no blame, no shame about HPV

Many people who learn they have HPV want to know who gave it to them. But there is no way to know for sure.

The virus is common. A person can have HPV for a long time before it is found.

If you have HPV, don't blame your partner. Also, don't assume that your partner is cheating. HPV is not a sign that you or your partner is having sex with someone else.

Instead, focus on protecting your health: Follow up with your doctor to make sure HPV does not lead to cervical cancer.



RESOURCES

You can get free or low-cost Pap tests through:

- ❖ **Indian Health Service (IHS)**
www.ihs.gov/FacilitiesServices/AreaOffices/AreaOffices_index.asp
- ❖ **The CDC Breast and Cervical Early Detection Cancer Program (BCCEDP):**
Phone: (888) 842-6355 or
<http://apps.nccd.cdc.gov/cancercontacts/nbccedp/contacts.asp>
- ❖ **OR, your local BCCEDP at:**
[Redacted]
- ❖ **Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) programs**
www.fns.usda.gov/wic/
- ❖ **Medicaid**
www.cms.hhs.gov/home/medicaid.asp
- ❖ **Medicare (if you're 65 years or older):**
www.cms.hhs.gov/home/medicare.asp
- ❖ **Most health plans**
- ❖ **Many tribal, state, and community programs, such as:**
[Redacted]
[Redacted]

For eligible girls age 18 or younger, there are programs to help pay for the vaccine. Ask your doctor or clinic for more information, or call:

- ❖ **The state of Alaska Immunization Program**
Hotline: 1-888-430-4321
- ❖ **State public health programs, such as:**
[Redacted]
- ❖ **Most insurance plans also cover the HPV vaccine.**

For women age 19 and older, Medicaid and other insurers may pay for the vaccine. Check with your doctor.

RESOURCES

Free condoms & reproductive health services:

- ❖ **Family Planning Clinics**
<http://opa.osophs.dhhs.gov/titlex/ofp-service-grantees.html>
- ❖ **Federally Qualified Health Centers**
<http://ask.hrsa.gov/pc>

For more information about HPV and related diseases, contact:

- ❖ **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)**
www.cdc.gov/std/hpv
24-hour Hotline: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636) or
1-888-232-6348 TTY or www.cdc.gov/cancer/cervical/basic_info
- ❖ **American Cancer Society (ACS)**
www.cancer.org
Hotline: Phone: (800) ACS-2345 [800-227-2345]
- ❖ **The American Social Health Association**
www.ashastd.org/
Resource Center/Hotline: 1-800-227-8922 (M-F, 9am-6pm EST)
Or email: hpvnet@ashastd.org

HPV is not something to fear. More than ever, Alaska Native girls and women are preventing cervical cancer. You and your family can, too.

Some facts about HPV:

- Most sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives.
- HPV is usually harmless. But some types can cause genital warts. Other types can cause cervical cancer in women.
- Men and women can lower their chances of getting HPV by using condoms with every sex act, and limiting their number of partners. But the only sure way to avoid HPV is never to have sex.
- What is most important is to prevent the most serious health effect of HPV: cervical cancer. Cervical cancer can be prevented with a safe HPV vaccine and regular screening (Pap) tests.

For more about HPV, call 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636)
or visit, www.cdc.gov/std/hpv

