

HPV Awareness and Screening

What is Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?

HPV is a group of over 150 related viruses, and is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI). HPV is not herpes (HSV), nor is it HIV. There are more than 40 HPV types that can infect both males and females. (4)

What are the symptoms?

HPV may not present any symptoms, and often resolves on its own. In many cases, HPV will cause genital warts to appear, this is often the first sign of infection.

Others may not find out they are infected with HPV until an abnormal Pap test. In some cases, a person may not find out they are infected until a more serious problem, such as cancer, develops.

It is possible that an HPV infection may result in zero health complications. However, in some cases infected persons may develop genital warts, or cancers. If you believe you may be infected with HPV, talk to your doctor about possible treatment options, as well as what to expect depending on which type of the virus you have contracted. (4)

Is there a test to tell me if I have HPV?

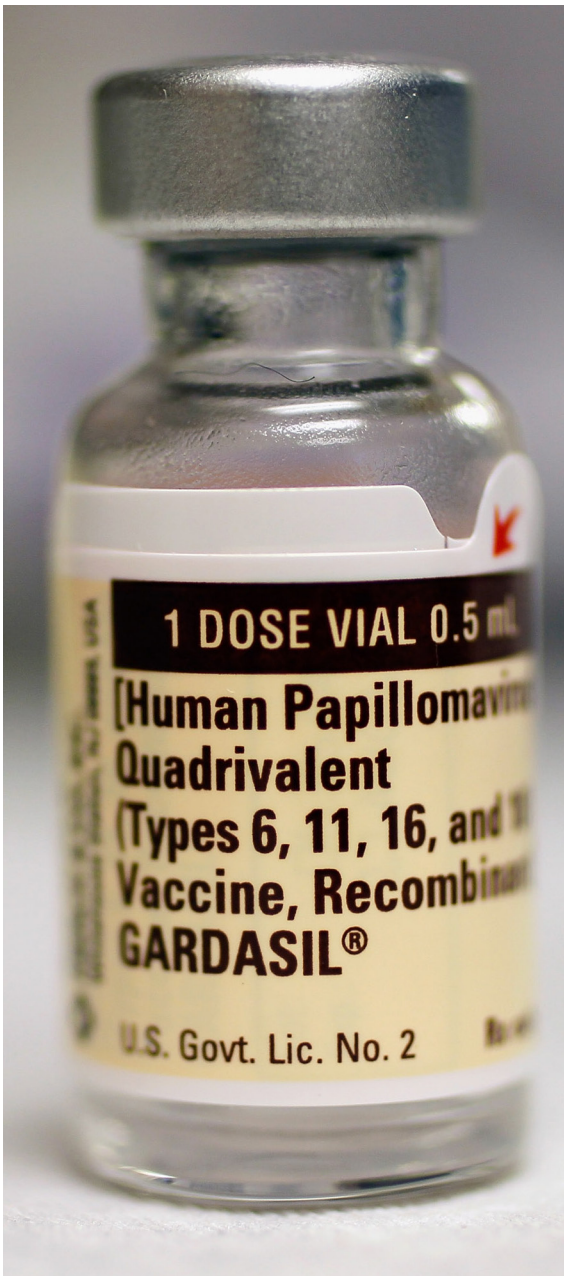
There is no test that will tell a person's "status" regarding HPV. There is also no approved HPV test to detect HPV in the mouth or the throat. However, there are HPV tests that can be used to screen for cervical cancer. These tests are recommended starting at age 30 for women, and are not recommended to screen men, adolescents, or women under 30. (4)



When should I talk to a doctor?

You should start talking to your doctor about HPV and related viruses as soon as you become sexually active.

The CDC recommends that women and men begin screening for HPV as early as age 21, although screening may not be needed until age 30. (4)



Is HPV treatable?

There is no treatment for the HPV virus. You can, however, treat the health complications that the virus can cause.

Genital warts can be treated either by you, or your doctor. If you suspect you may have HPV related warts, talk to your health care provider about possible treatment options (3).

What should I do if I think I may have HPV?

If you believe you may have been exposed to HPV, or if you have any health concerns related to the illness, talk to your health care provider immediately about possible testing and screening options.

Although there is no approved test to find HPV, there are tests that can screen for life-threatening cancers, which are more treatable in the early stages (See page 4) (3, 4, 5).

Do condoms prevent HPV?

Although condoms are a recommended protective measure for any sexually activity, they are not 100% effective at preventing HPV infection. Any sexual contact with an infected person, regardless if they are symptomatic, can result in an HPV infection (4).

What can I do to protect myself?

Although it is possible to still contract HPV in a mutually monogamous relationship, ensuring that you and your partner are only engaging in sexual activity with each other can be an important step in protecting yourself.

Condoms, when used correctly, can help prevent HPV, but they are not 100% effective. HPV vaccines are available and are safe and effective. They can protect males and females against diseases (including cancers) caused by HPV when given in the recommended age groups. HPV vaccines are given in three shots over six months. It is very important to get all three doses.

HPV Testing and Precancer Screening

Although there is no test that can tell you if you are infected with HPV, regular screening can help detect life-threatening cancers that can develop as a result of HPV infection. (1, 5)

What are my options for testing?

According to the CDC, there is no approved test to detect HPV, however, regular Pap screenings are effective for detecting the early signs of cervical cancer in women. There are currently no approved tests for men (3, 5).

According to Luo et. al., one effective option for HPV screening is the COBAS 4800 system. “Cobas4800 HPV test combined with cervico-vaginal specimens applied to both liquid media and POI solid card are accurate to detect HrHPV infection and high-grade cervical lesions as compared with direct endocervical samples in liquid media.” (8)

Is the COBAS test invasive?

Yes. The samples needed to perform the test must be acquired by means of a Pap test, which can be invasive. (2)



How does the COBAS testing system work?

The COBAS test analyzes the sample provided by a Pap test to check for HPV types 16 and 18, along with twelve other high-risk types of HPV. The system then pools the findings to provide you with a qualitative analysis of your risk for cancer. This process is automated by the COBAS 4800 system. (2)

Of the many types of HPV that a person can be infected with, types 16 and 18, along with 12 other types, carry the highest risk (7). The COBAS test looks for these types of HPV in order to detect cancer early.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the earlier cancer is detected, the easier it is to treat, and the higher the chance of survival. (3)

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