



# Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

## What is Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?

- The Human Papillomaviruses (HPV) are a group of viruses that cause genital warts, cervical abnormalities and cervical, vaginal and anal cancers.
- There are many different types of HPV, some of which cause warts and some of which cause cervical abnormalities, cervical cancer and other cancers.

## What is the link between HPV and cervical cancer?

- Cervical cancer affects about 1,350 women and causes 390 deaths each year in Canada.
- HPV infection is the cause of cervical cancer. Several types of HPV, including types 16 and 18, cause cervical cancer.
- Most women who have been exposed to HPV do not develop cancer of the cervix, even if the HPV is a cancer-causing type. HPV infection usually goes away on its own. However, in some women, the infection can remain and slowly lead to cancer if it is not found and treated.

## What is the link between HPV and genital warts?

- Genital warts are caused mainly by HPV types 6 and 11.

## How does someone get HPV?

- HPV can be passed from one person to another through direct skin contact that occurs during sexual activity.
- People with HPV infection may not know they have this infection because they can have no symptoms. However, they can pass the infection to their sexual partners.
- Depending on the type of HPV, their partners then have a chance of developing warts, cervical abnormalities that cause cancer, or other genital cancers.
- A large number of people are exposed to HPV viruses over their lifetimes. About 75% of sexually active Canadian men and women have been infected with HPV at some point in their lives.
- Condoms offer some protection, but the virus may be present on skin that is not covered by the condom.

## Are there treatment options for HPV?

- HPV usually goes away on its own.
- Treatment is available for genital warts.

- Pap tests will detect early abnormalities in the cervix caused by HPV. Treatment of these abnormalities can prevent cervical cancer.

## How can HPV and HPV-related problems be prevented?

- Abstinence is the best way to prevent HPV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
- Condoms will significantly decrease the risk of getting most STDs and will help lower the chances of getting HPV infection.
- To prevent cervical cancer, make sure to have a regular Pap test.
- There is a new vaccine available called Gardasil™ that can protect against four types of HPV infections – types 6, 11, 16 and 18. These types cause 70% of cervical cancers and 90% of genital warts.

## How does Gardasil™ work?

- Gardasil™ provides protection against HPV types 6, 11, 16 and 18. HPV types 6 and 11 cause 90% of genital warts. HPV types 16 and 18 cause 70% of cervical cancers.
- Being vaccinated will significantly lower the chances of getting both genital warts and cervical cancer. Gardasil™ is expected to provide long-term protection.
- The vaccine does not protect against all HPV types that cause cervical cancer; therefore sexually active vaccinated women must continue to have regular Pap tests.

## Who should get Gardasil™?

- Gardasil™ is recommended for girls and women aged 9 to 26 years.
- It is best to receive Gardasil™ before becoming sexually active, although sexually active women can still be vaccinated.
- Once women are sexually active, the chances of being exposed to HPV infection increase.
- Public funding is available for Grade 8 girls to receive the vaccine free through a school-based program. Participation in the HPV vaccine program is voluntary. It is not required for school attendance under current law in Ontario (Immunization of School Pupils Act).
- Other females aged nine to 26 can see their doctors and pay for the vaccine. The three shots cost between \$400 and \$500. Some health insurance plans may cover the cost of the vaccine.

## Who should not get Gardasil™?

- Women over 26 years of age and men. (Studies are still being conducted.)
- Women who are, or may be, pregnant. (They should be vaccinated once they deliver.)
- Anyone who is sick with a fever or infection worse than a cold.
- Anyone who is allergic to any components of the vaccine or who has a yeast allergy.

## How is Gardasil™ given?

- Three doses of Gardasil™ are recommended. The second and third doses are given at two months and six months.

## What are the side effects of Gardasil™?

- The most common side effect is redness, tenderness and swelling where the vaccine was given.
- Fever, nausea, dizziness and headaches can occur.
- Allergic reactions such as hives, wheezing or swelling of the face and mouth can happen, but rarely do, after any vaccine. If these symptoms occur, seek medical attention right away.

If you have any questions or need more information, please contact a member of the Vaccine Preventable Disease Program by calling the Haldimand-Norfolk Health Unit at 519-426-6170 or 905-318-6623.



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