



## Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs)

# HPV and Men - Fact Sheet

## 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 through sexual contact. These types can infect the genital areas of men, including the skin on and around the penis or anus. They can also infect the mouth and throat.

## 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, anal, or head and neck cancers. The types of HPV that can cause genital warts are not the same as the types that can cause 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.
- Each year in the U.S. there are about:
  - 800 men who get HPV-related penile cancer
  - 1100 men who get HPV-related anal cancer
  - 5700 men who get HPV-related head and neck cancers. [Note: although HPV is associated with some of head and neck cancers, most of these cancers are related to smoking and heavy drinking.]

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

- Men who have sex with men are about 17 times more likely to develop anal cancer than men who only have sex with women.
- Men with weakened 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 harder to treat.

## What are the signs and symptoms?

Most men who get HPV never develop any symptoms or health problems. But for those who do develop health problems, these are some of the signs and symptoms 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:

There may be no signs or symptoms until the cancer is quite advanced

- **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.

### Signs and symptoms of head and neck cancers

- Sore throat or ear pain that doesn't go away
- Constant coughing
- Pain or trouble swallowing or breathing
- Weight loss
- Hoarseness or voice changes that last more than 2 weeks
- Lump or mass in the neck
- Cancer that forms on the vocal cords are often found early because they cause hoarseness. Cancers that start above or below the vocal cords are often found at later stages.

## How do Men get HPV?

HPV is passed on through genital contact—most often during vaginal and anal sex. HPV may also be passed on during oral 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. Even men with only one lifetime sex partner can get HPV.

## Is there a test for HPV in men?

Currently, there is no test to find HPV in men. The only approved HPV tests on the market are *not* useful for screening for HPV-related cancers or genital warts in men.

- Some doctors use anal Pap tests to screen for anal cancer in men, however, there is no routine screening recommended for anal cancer. Anal cancer screening cannot be recommended until more research is done on how best to screen for anal cancer and if screening can reduce the risk of anal cancer.
- There is no approved test to find genital warts for men or women. However, 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. If you think you may have genital warts, you should see a health care provider.
- There is no test for men 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. 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.
- Screening tests are not available for penile cancer.

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 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?

A safe and effective HPV vaccine (Gardasil) is available to protect males against the HPV types that cause most (90%) of genital warts. The vaccine is available for boys and men, ages 9 through 26 years. It is given in three shots over six months.

Condoms (if used with every sex act, from start to finish) 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.

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

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

The HPV vaccine (Gardasil) works by preventing four common HPV types, two that cause genital warts and two that cause some cancers. It protects against new HPV infections; it does not cure existing HPV infections or disease (like genital warts). It is most effective when given before first

sexual contact (i.e., before he may be exposed to HPV).

Some men may benefit more from this vaccine than others.

- Males who have not yet had sex will benefit most from the vaccine, since they are unlikely to have been infected with HPV. Young sexually active men may also benefit from the vaccine, but they will get less benefit from it if they have already been infected with HPV.
- Young men who have sex with men might benefit more from this vaccine, especially if they have had few or no partners prior to vaccination, since they are more likely to develop HPV-related diseases than other men.

The HPV vaccine is very safe and effective, with no serious side effects. The most common side effect is soreness in the arm.

Available data show that the vaccine can protect men against genital warts. It is possible that this vaccine also protects men from HPV-related cancers, like anal and penile cancers. Studies are being completed to evaluate this.

## I just found out that 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.

Condoms may lower your chances of getting HPV or developing HPV-related diseases, if used with every sex act, from start to finish. You may want to consider talking to your doctor about being vaccinated against HPV if you are 26 years or younger. . But not having sex is the only sure way to avoid HPV.

If your partner has genital warts, you should avoid having sex until the warts are gone or removed. You should check for any abnormalities on your penis, such as genital warts. Also, you may want to get checked by a health care provider for genital warts and other sexually transmitted disease (STDs).

### **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.

## I just found out I have genital warts ...

### **What does it mean for me and my partner?**

Having genital warts may be hard to cope with, but they are not a threat to your health. People with genital warts can still lead normal, healthy lives.

Because genital warts may be easily passed on to sex partners, you should inform them about having genital warts and avoid sexual activity until the warts are gone or removed. There are ways to protect your partner (see above).

You and your partner may benefit from getting screened for other STDs.

It is not clear if there is any health benefit to informing your (future) sex partners about a past diagnosis of genital warts. This is because it is not known how long a person remains contagious after warts are gone.



All

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## Where can I get more information?

[Sexually Transmitted Diseases \(/std/\)](/std/) - Home Page

[Human Papillomavirus \(HPV\) Infection \(http://www.cdc.gov/hpv/\)](http://www.cdc.gov/hpv/) - Topic Page

STD information and referrals to STD Clinics

CDC-INFO

1-800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)

TTY: 1-888-232-6348

In English, en Español

[American Cancer Society \(ACS\)](http://www.cancer.org/)  (<http://www.cancer.org/>)

[National Cancer Institute](http://www.cancer.gov/)  (<http://www.cancer.gov/>)

[CDC Division of Cancer Prevention and Control \(http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/index.htm\)](http://www.cdc.gov/cancer/index.htm)

[CDC National Prevention Information Network](http://www.cdcnpin.org/scripts/index.asp)  (<http://www.cdcnpin.org/scripts/index.asp>) (NPIN)

P.O. Box 6003


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[American Social Health Association \(ASHA\)](http://www.ashastd.org/)  (<http://www.ashastd.org/>)

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