



Genital Warts (HPV)

What is HPV?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI), infecting up to 70% of sexually active Canadians. There are over 100 different types of HPV, most of which are harmless and pass through the body without any symptoms. More than 40 types of HPV can affect the areas on or between the genitals and the anus. This virus poses a problem for all sexually active people, since it causes an increase in the risk of cervical and anal cancer. Remember that regular STI screening DOES NOT test for HPV. You must specifically request this from your health professional.

How Are Genital Warts Transmitted?

HPV is transmitted through any kind of sexual activity that involves direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected area. This includes vaginal, anal, and oral sex, as well as fingering, fisting, rubbing, touching, scissoring, and sharing sex toys. HPV can be transmitted to any person who has ever had any sexual contact, regardless of gender or sexual orientation. This virus is non-discriminatory and has the potential to infect all sexually active individuals.

What Are the Symptoms of HPV?

HPV often does not cause any symptoms, so you may contract the virus and spread it without even realizing that you have it. Even if it has been a few years since your last sexual activity, the virus can still be present in your body. Transmission of HPV usually occurs during an outbreak of symptoms but can also occur even if symptoms are not present. Symptoms can include warts that can grow on the vulva, urethra, cervix, vagina or thigh. They can also occur around the penis, scrotum or the anus. They can also grow in the mouth or throat of a person who has had oral sex with an infected person. Symptoms may occur within 1-8 months after exposure via skin-to-skin contact with an infected person. If symptoms are left untreated and/or continue to persist, this may be an indication generally of cervical or anal cancer and should be checked out by a health professional.

What Are the Different Types of HPV?

Low-risk types of HPV may cause genital warts which can form weeks, months, or years after

sexual contact with an infected person. Flesh-coloured or grey warts, which may grow in clusters and may cause itching, burning, and discomfort in the anal or genital areas. High-risk types of HPV can cause cell changes and pre-cancerous lesions that may lead to cervical or anal cancer, if not treated.

I Was Diagnosed With HPV....

Now what?

The immune system is generally able to fight off a HPV infection, meaning that the virus may pass through the body naturally and go away by itself, with or without any sort of medical intervention. In 90% of cases, low-risk types of HPV work their way through the body without any symptoms and clear spontaneously within 18 months. In fact, you may never even realize that you have had the virus! If symptoms do occur, they are easily treatable, either by a medical procedure (burning or freezing the warts off) or by topical cream. On average, the treatment of cervical, anal, and genital warts take approximately 8 months. Without any sort of medical intervention at all, symptoms will naturally leave the body within one or two years. Even when symptoms disappear, you may be infected with HPV again and may experience recurrences of symptoms in the future. Women who are pregnant, or individuals with HIV, AIDS, and different types of cancer, may experience recurring symptoms due to a weakened immune system.

Remember that HPV is a very common STI and that most sexually active individual will be infected with it at least once in their lives.

What Can I Do to Protect Myself?

Any time that you have sexual contact with a partner, you run the risk of transmitting HPV. Although you will never be totally protected against HPV, even when you are using protection, proper and consistent use of safer sex practices will help to protect you from the virus as much as possible.

How Can I Practice Safer Sex?

- Wash your hands with soap after touching your partner(s)'s genitals, and before touching your own, since HPV can be transmitted through fingering and fisting without protection.
- Use latex gloves and water-based lubricant when touching or penetrating the genitals/anus.
- Use condoms on sex aids/toys. Make sure that you and your partner(s) each have your own or sterilize them before sharing. Clean them well after every use.
- During an outbreak of HPV symptoms, abstain from having sexual contact with your partner(s) until symptoms have subsided. Be open and honest with your partner(s) if you are infected with HPV. Talk about methods of safer sex with your partner(s).
- Vaginal Sex (including sex toys): Use a condom (external or internal), latex or non-latex.
- Oral Sex on a penis: Use a non-lubricated or flavoured external condom (latex or non-latex)
- Oral Sex on a Vagina or Anus: Use a dental dam. You can make your own from an unrolled external condom (non-lubricated or flavoured). Cut off the tip of the condom, snip up one side, and unroll. *See 'Dental Dam' pamphlet for more information.*

- Anal Sex (including sex toys): Use an external condom (latex or non-latex)

And, NEVER use two condoms at once!!

What if My Symptoms Persist?

During a Pap test, if your doctor notices any persistent cell abnormalities, you may be referred for further examination. Abnormal cells may indicate cervical or anal cancer, which are the most preventable and curable forms of cancer, if detected early. Early detection means that these cancers be treated successfully.

Please note that a vaccine is available to women and men to prevent the two most common high-risk HPV types associated with pre-cancerous cervical cells and the two most common low-risk HPV types associated with genital/anal warts. Speak to your health professional if you are interested in the vaccine.

If you would like further information on HPV, STIs, testing and/or safer sex practices, please feel free to drop by our Centre or contact us by phone or email. If you want to see a doctor for confidential STI testing, please call us to make an appointment. For further information, please refer to the pamphlets concerning HPV and the transgendered population as well.

Sexual Health Questions? We Have Answers!

Location:

47 St. Clare Avenue, St. John's, NL, A1C 2J9

Hours:

Monday: 9am - 4:30pm

Tuesday: 9am - 4:30pm

Wednesday: 9pm - 4:30pm

Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm

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