



HPV and Pap Tests for Trans Men

What is HPV?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI), infecting up to 75% 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 can affect the areas on or between the genitals and the anus. HPV poses a problem for **any sexually active individual** since it causes an increase in the risk of cervical, anal and penile cancer.

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 identity. This virus is non-discriminatory and has the potential to affect all sexually active individuals. *No matter what you may have heard, if you are a sexually active trans man, or if you have ever had any sort of sexual contact with another person, you can be infected with HPV and should get a Pap test or an anal Pap test in order to keep yourself healthy.*

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. Low-risk types of HPV may cause warts which can form weeks, months, or years after sexual contact with an infected person. The warts, which usually grow in clusters, may cause itching, burning, and discomfort in the anal and genital areas. They may also grow in the mouth or throat of a person who has had oral sex with an infected person. Symptoms will usually occur within 1-8 months after exposure via skin-to-skin contact with an infected person. High-risk types of HPV can cause cell changes and pre-cancerous lesions that may lead to anal or genital cancer, if left untreated.

I Have HPV.... Now What?

The immune system is generally able to fight off an 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 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 anal and genital warts takes approximately 8 months. Even when symptoms disappear, you may be infected with HPV again and may experience recurrences of symptoms in the future. People 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 individuals will be infected with it at least once in their lives.

Please note that regular STI screening DOES NOT test for HPV.

What Can I Do to Protect Myself?

Any time that you have sexual contact with your partner(s), you run the risk of transmitting HPV, if either/any of you is/are infected. You will never be totally protected against HPV, even when you are using protection. Condoms do not offer 100% protection from HPV, since the virus lives on skin which is not covered by a condom. Proper and consistent use of the following safer sex practices will help to protect you from the virus as much as possible:

- Use a dental dam or a condom during oral and penetrative 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 or anus.
- Use condoms on sex 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).
- A vaccine is now available for the two most common types of HPV. Speak to your health professional for more information.
 - Get a regular Pap test or anal Pap test.

Should I Be Concerned With HPV?

Please note that any person who has ever had any sexual contact with any other individual, regardless of gender, may be infected with HPV! This virus does not discriminate based on gender identity. It doesn't care who you are or who you have sex with! As long as you have ever had sexual contact with anyone, you have a chance of being infected with HPV. And, if you have a cervix, this means that you run the risk of getting cervical cancer. If you have had bottom surgery, you run the risk of getting penile cancer. Anal cancer is also a risk if you engage in receptive anal sex. Please be pro-active with your health and get a Pap test or an anal Pap test in order to protect yourself against genital or anal cancer.

What Is a Pap or Anal Pap Test?

A Pap test is the primary screening tool for cervical cancer, and an anal Pap test is the primary screening tool for anal cancer. The tests identify changes in cells, potentially caused by HPV, which may develop into cervical or anal cancer. Neither test screens for any sexually transmitted infections.

During a Pap test or an **anal Pap test**, doctors take a sample either of cervical cells, using a small brush, or anal cells, using a cotton swab, which are then examined at a lab. If abnormal cells are found, they can

be removed or treated, decreasing the risk of cervical or anal cancer. Depending on the results of your test, patients may be referred onwards for further examination.

Both cervical and anal cancer are very preventable and treatable, if detected early. Additionally, with both types of cancers, symptoms may not appear until an advanced stage. So, the best way to protect yourself against cervical or anal cancer is by getting a regular Pap or anal Pap test and keeping an eye on your genital and anal health.

Should I Get a Pap or Anal Pap Test?

If you have ever been sexually active and you have a cervix, it is recommended to get a regular Pap test. If you have had a hysterectomy that left your cervix intact, it is recommended to get a regular Pap test. If you have had a complete hysterectomy, in which both the uterus and the cervix were removed, you do not need to get a Pap test. In this case, it is recommended to get a vault sample every five years, in which vaginal cells are collected and examined.

If you have had a colpectomy (removal of the vagina) or colpocleisis (closure of the vagina), or phalloplasty (construction of a penis) you cannot have a Pap test since you do not have a cervix.

If you have ever engaged in sexual activity in or around the anus, it is advisable to get an anal Pap test. Please speak with a healthcare professional for more information.

What If I am Taking Testosterone?

If you are currently taking testosterone (“T”), your vagina may feel very dry, which can make a Pap test feel uncomfortable. Inform your doctor that you are taking “T” before the Pap test, so that they can take extra precautions to make you more comfortable. It is also important to inform your doctor that you are taking “T” since your results may need to be interpreted differently. Testosterone can cause abnormalities in cervical cells. These abnormal cells are not the same as pre-cancerous cells, and do not increase the risk of cervical cancer. If your Pap test indicates abnormal cells, your doctor may request another test or a colposcopy for further examination.

What Can I Expect from The Test?

It is completely normal to feel a mix of feelings before a Pap test or an anal Pap test. You might find it uncomfortable for a doctor to touch your genitals or anus. But don’t worry! Both tests are generally quick, painless procedures. You may experience some pressure or mild discomfort during either of the procedures. If you do not engage in penetrative sex, or if you have experienced trauma or abuse in the past, the test may be intimidating for you. To become more comfortable with penetration, you may practice at home on your own or with a partner, with small sex toys or fingers. If you are still feeling uneasy about having a Pap test or an anal Pap test, you may meet with your doctor in order to discuss your concerns. Find a doctor with whom you can have an open dialogue about your health in order to ensure that your health needs are being recognized and met. Remember that you are keeping yourself healthy by having a Pap or anal Pap test, so book one today! You may make an appointment here at Planned Parenthood, where we offer a comfortable, confidential and safe environment with knowledgeable and helpful doctors, staff members, and volunteers.

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: 9am – 4:30pm

Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm

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