



## What You Need to Know About

# HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV)

## What is HPV?

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- HPV is a Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) caused by the human papillomavirus which is a viral infection
- There are more than 100 types of HPV, and some affect the genital area<sup>7</sup>
- HPV is very common and nothing to be ashamed of

## Prevention:

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- Regular screening: Pap smears every 3 years (starting at age 25, or as recommended by your provider)
- HPV testing: Helps detect precancerous changes early<sup>3</sup>
- Colposcopy & VIA (visual inspection with acetic acid): Special tests for closer examination<sup>3</sup>
- Vaccination: Offered in schools (Grade 6) and available at community health centers, local clinics and pharmacies<sup>3</sup>
- Safer sex practices: Use condoms and dental dams to lower risk<sup>3</sup>
- Protecting partners: Talk openly about HPV and safer sex<sup>3</sup>

## Symptoms:

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### See your health care provider if you notice:

- Genital warts<sup>3</sup>
- Receive abnormal pap smear results<sup>3</sup>
- Itching or discomfort<sup>3</sup>
- Flat lesions<sup>3</sup>
- Changes in skin color<sup>3</sup>

Ask nurse or doctor how frequently you should have tests that may indicate HPV pap smear



## How it Spreads + Who is at Risk:

- HPV is spread through sexual contact (vaginal, anal, and oral sex) or skin-to-skin genital contact with someone who has HPV<sup>1</sup>
- Poses greatest risk to females because almost all cervical cancers are caused by HPV

## Common Misconceptions Around Acquiring/Getting HPV:

- By touching objects (door handles, bus seats, etc.)<sup>6</sup>
- From the air (sneezing or coughing)<sup>6</sup>
- From casual contact (hugging, holding hands, etc.)<sup>6</sup>
- From sharing dishes or drinks<sup>6</sup>

## Cancer Risks:

**Most HPV doesn't lead to cancer**, however some types can cause cancer of the:

- Lower part of the uterus that connects to vagina (cervix)
- Anus
- Penis
- Vagina
- Vulva and back of throat (oropharyngeal cancer)<sup>1</sup>



## HPV For Indigenous Women:

- For Indigenous women, access to screening and vaccination can be limited by systemic barriers such as location, stigma, or lack of culturally safe care
- Ask about mobile screening programs, community health nurses or Indigenous health organizations for support

## Treatment:

- Even though HPV is the most common STI, and is highly contagious, 9 out of 10 HPV infections go away without treatment within two years<sup>2</sup>
- There is no cure to remove HPV from the body, but treatment is available for genital warts (anogenital warts) and for abnormal cell changes in the cervix<sup>2</sup>

### REFERENCES

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6. [fnha.ca/what-we-do/healthy-living/cancer/hpv](http://fnha.ca/what-we-do/healthy-living/cancer/hpv)
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