

? What is HPV?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus that you can get by having sex with someone who has it. It's not the same as HIV or HSV (Herpes Simplex Virus). It may cause warts in men and women, and cervical cancer in women.

HPV is the most common Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) in the United States. There are about 40 types of HPV, and many sexually active adults get one or more types at some time in their lives.



But most people never know, because **HPV usually shows no signs and goes away on its own without causing problems.** The body fights it off.

HPV is spread through the rubbing of genital skin. This means that you can get it through vaginal sex, anal sex, and even foreplay. You are more likely to get it if you have sex at an early age, have more than one sex partner, and/or have a sex partner who has other partners.

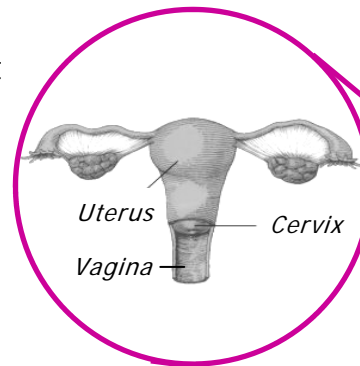
Right now, no HPV tests are available for men. Women can get tested for the effects of HPV by getting regular Pap tests.

? Will HPV make me sick?

For most people, HPV won't make them sick; the body cures the infection without ever showing any signs. Some people with HPV develop genital warts. Others get cervical cancer (if it's not found early and cured).

- ➔ "Low-Risk" types of HPV can cause visible warts in and around the genitals. They can also cause abnormal Pap tests, but do not cause cervical cancer. There is treatment to make these visible warts go away. Eventually, the virus goes away too. But this can take two years or more.
- ➔ "High-Risk" types can cause normal cells to turn abnormal. Most of the time, these cells go back to normal. But if HPV stays for many years, these abnormal cells may turn into cervical and other cancers. These are found by Pap tests, and can be treated and cured.

If you have HPV, it's important to get regular Pap tests. You can also reduce your risk by not smoking.



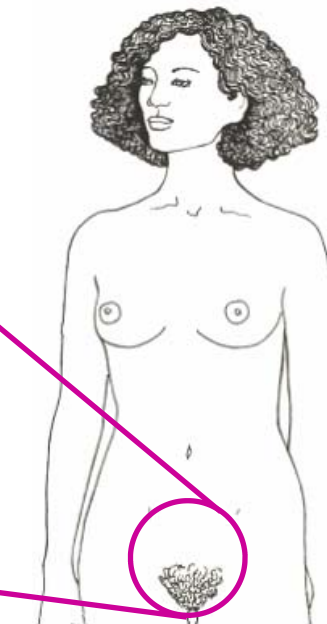
The cervix is the opening between the vagina (birth canal) and the uterus (womb).

? Can I prevent cervical cancer?

Yes. Women can get regular Pap tests that will find early signs of cancer. Cervical cancer is curable if found early.

A **Pap test** looks for changes in the female cervix that are caused by HPV. Only a few women with HPV will get cervical cancer. If HPV causes changes in your cervix, your doctor or nurse may treat you.

Most women should start getting Pap tests three years after they start having sex, or when they turn 21—whichever comes first. Pap tests should then be every year after that. Ask your doctor for more details.



If you're a female over 30 or have had an abnormal Pap test, your doctor may test you for High-Risk HPV. This **HPV test** can be done at the same time as the Pap test.

To find a free or low-cost Pap test, call the Office of Women's Health at **1-800-793-8090.**

The HPV Vaccine

The new vaccine protects against four types of HPV: two “Low-Risk” types and two “High-Risk” types. These are the four types that cause most genital warts and cervical cancers. But because the vaccine does not protect against all types of HPV, **regular Pap tests are still important.**



The vaccine is recommended for girls 11 to 12 years old. Doctors can give it to girls as young as 9 and as old as 26. **It's important for girls to get the vaccine before they start having sex—because they haven't yet been exposed to HPV.** The vaccine does not protect girls who have already been infected.

Some insurance plans and federal or state programs offer the vaccine at low cost or for free; ask your doctor for details.

To find free or low-cost vaccines in L.A. County, call the Department of Public Health at
1-800-427-8700

Protecting Yourself

- **Use a condom every time you have sex.** Condoms can protect the covered areas from infection. Be sure that you know how to use them the right way.
- **Limit your number of partners.** The more people you have sex with, the greater your chances of getting HPV and other STDs.
- **Get regular Pap tests.** These can find changes in the cervix caused by HPV, and help to prevent cervical cancer (see reverse for details).
- **Take charge of your health.** Pap tests and HPV tests aren't always done during pelvic exams. Talk with your doctor about which tests are right for you, and follow up with the appointments and care that she/he recommends.
- **Don't smoke.** Smoking increases your risk of getting HPV and cervical cancer. For help quitting, call the California Smoker's Hotline at 1-800-NO BUTTS.

For more information about HPV, call the STD Hotline at
1-800-758-0880
or visit
www.lapublichealth.org/std

HPV

Basics



Important Facts About Human Papillomavirus and Cervical Health

