

What You Should Know About HPV

Why is it so critical to get a physical examination—including a Pap smear test—by an OB-GYN at least once a year?

Among other ailments, it can identify one of the most common, incurable and potentially harmful sexually transmitted diseases—human papillomavirus (HPV). This condition is linked to genital warts and cervical cancer, and rates of invasive cervical cancer increase more strikingly with age among African American women. Without knowledge about the nature of this illness, you may be among the 20 million people already infected—and not even know it. Or you may become one of the 5.5 million new annual cases of this disease. Read and share the information below to help you or someone you love avoid becoming another statistic.



What is HPV?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, by age 50, at least 80 percent of women will have acquired a genital HPV infection. About 30 forms are spread through sexual contact. Many types of HPV are harmless, but some cause genital warts—extremely contagious bumps that are transmitted via skin contact during vaginal, anal, or in rare cases, oral sex and appear on the vagina, cervix, vulva, penis and rectum (although it's possible to have a genital HPV infection without genital warts). While genital warts are considered low-risk, certain potent strains can cause abnormal Pap smear results and can lead to cervical cancer. Often there are no symptoms for this illness—which is why knowledge is vital in preventing and treating it.

How are HPV and genital warts diagnosed?

A health care provider can:

- Diagnose genital warts by seeing them.
- In the case of invisible warts, apply vinegar to areas of the body that may be infected to expose the warts.
- Look for indicators of HPV infection in an abnormal Pap smear test.

How can HPV be prevented?

Unfortunately HPV is so common because many infected people don't have symptoms and consequently spread the virus to others. But the risk of an HPV infection can be prevented or reduced by:

- Avoiding direct sexual contact with someone who has visible warts in the genital area.
- Using condoms.
- Reducing your number of sexual partners or staying in a monogamous relationship.

Where can I get more information?

Web MD - www.mywebmd.com