



Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

What is HPV?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs), with over 100 strains, about 40 of which affect the genital area. Some HPV strains can cause genital warts, while high-risk strains may lead to cancers, including cervical, anal, penile, and oropharyngeal (throat) cancers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2022a; World Health Organization [WHO], 2022).

Signs and Symptoms

- Most HPV infections have no symptoms and clear on their own, so people often do not realize they have it (Mayo Clinic, 2022).
- **Visible symptoms may include:**
 - Genital warts: Small, cauliflower-like growths that appear on the genital, anal, or, in rare cases, oral area.
 - **Changes in cervical or anal cells:** Only detectable through screenings, such as Pap tests (for cervix) or anal Pap tests (CDC, 2022a).
- Cancer symptoms due to HPV may not appear until years after infection and can include unusual bleeding, pain, lumps, or lesions in the affected area (American Cancer Society [ACS], 2022a).

Incubation Period

The incubation period for HPV can vary:

- Warts: May appear from 1 month to several months after exposure (Mayo Clinic, 2022).
- Cancer-related strains: HPV infections linked to cancer may be dormant for many years before causing health issues (CDC, 2022b; National Cancer Institute [NCI], 2022).

HPV and Cancer in Penis & Vulva Owners

HPV-Related Cancers in Vulva Owners:

- **Cervical Cancer:** Nearly all cervical cancers are caused by HPV, primarily by high-risk strains such as HPV-16 and HPV-18 (ACS, 2022a).
- **Screening:** Vulva owners aged 21–65 should have regular Pap smears and, in some cases, HPV testing to detect abnormal cervical cells (Planned Parenthood, 2022a).
- **Vulvar and Vaginal Cancers:** Less common but also associated with high-risk HPV strains (CDC, 2022a).
- **Oropharyngeal Cancer:** Affecting the throat, base of the tongue, and tonsils, this cancer is also caused by HPV, particularly HPV-16, and affects both penis and vulva owners (Johns Hopkins Medicine, 2022).

HPV-Related Cancers in Penis Owners:

- **Anal Cancer:** High-risk HPV strains can cause anal cancer in both penis and vulva owners, and those who engage in anal sex may benefit from screenings to monitor for precancerous changes (NCI, 2022).
- **Penile Cancer:** Rare but associated with high-risk HPV strains. The cancer may form on the shaft or under the foreskin in uncircumcised penis owners (WHO, 2022).
- **Oropharyngeal Cancer:** Similar to vulva owners, penis owners can also develop cancers in the throat, tonsils, and tongue due to HPV, especially HPV-16 (Johns Hopkins Medicine, 2022).

Treatments

While there is no cure for HPV, treatments are available to manage symptoms and health risks:

1. **Genital Warts:** Can be treated with topical medications, cryotherapy (freezing), or minor surgical procedures (Mayo Clinic, 2022).
2. **Precancerous Changes:** Detected through screenings may require removal through treatments such as a loop electrosurgical excision procedure (LEEP) (ACS, 2022a).
3. **HPV-Related Cancers:** Treatment includes standard cancer therapies like surgery, radiation, or chemotherapy, depending on the cancer's location and stage (NCI, 2022).



Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

Prevention for All Genders

1. Vaccination:

- HPV Vaccine (such as Gardasil 9) protects against multiple high-risk HPV strains that can lead to cancers and warts (ACS, 2022b; CDC, 2022a).
- **Age recommendation:** The vaccine is most effective when administered before sexual activity, generally recommended for preteens (ages 11–12) but available up to age 45 (WHO, 2022).
- **Vaccination for All Genders:** Both penis and vulva owners benefit from the vaccine, as it reduces the risk of cancers and helps limit HPV spread (NCI, 2022).

2. Safe Sexual Practices:

- Condoms and dental dams reduce HPV transmission risk but do not completely eliminate it, as HPV can infect areas not covered (American Sexual Health Association [ASHA], 2022).
- **Communication with Sexual Partners:** Open discussions about HPV, STI testing, and vaccinations can help partners make informed decisions and reduce transmission risk (Planned Parenthood, 2022b).

3. Regular Screenings:

- **Pap smears and HPV testing:** Vulva owners aged 21–65 should have regular cervical screenings to monitor for abnormal cells and early signs of cervical cancer (CDC, 2022b).
- **Anal Pap tests:** Screening is available for anyone who engages in anal sex to monitor for precancerous changes (ASHA, 2022).

Key Takeaways for All Genders

- **HPV is common:** Most sexually active people will contract HPV at some point (CDC, 2022a).
- Vaccination is an effective preventive measure for both penis and vulva owners (WHO, 2022).
- Regular screenings are critical for early detection of precancerous changes, particularly for cervical and anal health (NCI, 2022).
- Education and communication with partners can reduce the risk of HPV transmission for everyone (ASHA, 2022).

For additional information on HPV, its prevention, and treatment options, speak with your healthcare provider or local health department.

References

- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). HPV and HPV vaccination. CDC. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/hpv/>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2022). HPV and cancer. CDC. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/cancer/hpv/>
- World Health Organization. (2022). Human papillomavirus (HPV) and cervical cancer. WHO. Retrieved from [https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/human-papillomavirus-\(hpv\)-and-cervical-cancer](https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/human-papillomavirus-(hpv)-and-cervical-cancer)
- American Cancer Society. (2022). HPV and cancer. American Cancer Society. Retrieved from <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/cervical-cancer/causes-risks-prevention/hpv-and-cervical-cancer-info.html>
- American Cancer Society. (2022). HPV vaccines. American Cancer Society. Retrieved from <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/cervical-cancer/causes-risks-prevention/hpv-vaccine.html>
- National Cancer Institute. (2022). HPV and cancer risk. National Institutes of Health. Retrieved from <https://www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/infectious-agents/hpv-and-cancer>
- Planned Parenthood. (2022). HPV information. Planned Parenthood. Retrieved from <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/stds-hiv-safer-sex/hpv>
- Planned Parenthood. (2022). Does the HPV vaccine protect against cancer? Planned Parenthood. Retrieved from <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/learn/stds-hiv-safer-sex/hpv/does-the-hpv-vaccine-protect-against-cancer>
- Mayo Clinic. (2022). HPV infection. Mayo Clinic. Retrieved from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/hpv-infection/symptoms-causes/syc-20351596>
- American Sexual Health Association. (2022). HPV resource center. ASHA. Retrieved from <https://www.ashasexualhealth.org/human-papillomavirus-hpv/>
- Johns Hopkins Medicine. (2022). HPV and oropharyngeal cancer. Johns Hopkins Medicine. Retrieved from <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/oropharyngeal-cancer>
- National Institutes of Health. (2022). HPV research and facts. National Institutes of Health. Retrieved from <https://www.nih.gov/news-events/hpv-research-facts>