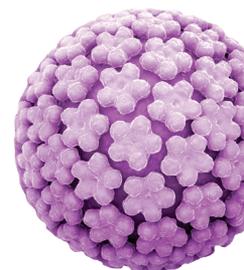
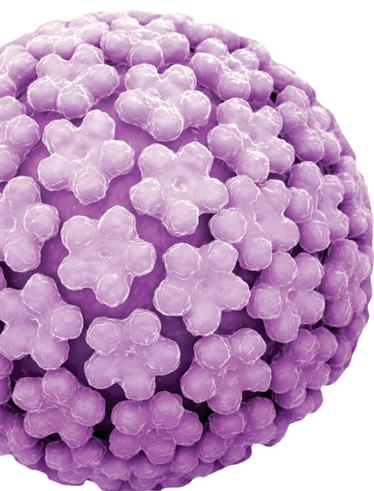
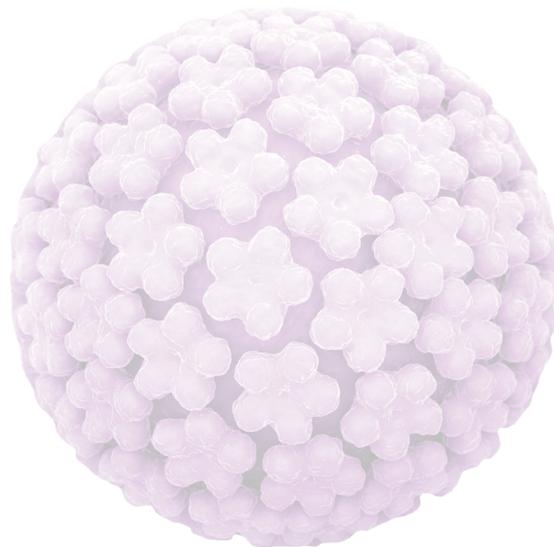


# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT HPV

## HPV & CANCER

Human papillomavirus (HPV) affects everyone. Raising awareness of HPV and learning more about how it is passed on, prevented and managed, can help to eliminate the virus and reduce the risk of developing certain cancers.



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## HOW IS HPV DIAGNOSED?

While HPV can cause cancers in men and women, currently the only test available for diagnosing HPV is the cervical screening test for women. Men are not routinely eligible for HPV testing and there is also no approved test for genital warts. For more information see: **“What You Need to Know About HPV: Risks & Prevention.”**

## WHY IS SCREENING IMPORTANT?

Almost everyone will, at some point in their lives have HPV. The majority of people will never know they have the virus because it doesn't always cause symptoms. The body's immune system normally clears HPV infection within a couple of years. However, for some, HPV can cause persistent infections that cannot be dealt with by their immune system. Persistent HPV infection in specific parts of the body can, in time, cause cells to change and this can lead to certain cancers including cancer of the cervix, vulva, vagina, penis, and anus as well as cancer in the throat and mouth including the tongue and tonsils.

Cervical screening (as part of a pap or smear test) is a test offered to women to detect abnormal cells in the cervix which develop in to cervical cancer. In 2018 it is estimated that 570,000 women will be diagnosed with cervical cancer and over 98% of these cases will be caused by HPV. Screening tests are voluntary, but they are really important in detecting early changes to cells before they develop into cancer, making it much easier to treat and improving prognosis

## WHAT HAPPENS DURING CERVICAL SCREENING?

Cervical screening is a short, painless procedure that takes only a few minutes. A healthcare professional will use an instrument called a speculum to widen the vagina so they can examine the vagina and cervix and take a sample of the cells on the cervix. This sample will be examined in a laboratory. Many countries are now introducing the option for women to collect their own samples in places that are private and convenient to them; for example, at home. This is called self-sampling and the sample collected is taken to a health center for testing.

Depending on local practice, the results will usually be returned to you or your healthcare provider within four to six weeks. Two types of screening tests can help to detect early signs of cervical cancer:



### PAP/SMEAR TEST

This test has been used for many decades to look for precancerous cell changes of the cervical cells.



### HPV TEST

This is a more sensitive test which looks specifically for the presence or absence of HPV in the precancerous cells which can be the cause of the cell changes.

These tests look for the presence of HPV or any abnormalities in cervix cells. A screening test is not a test for cancer, but is a way to identify individuals at a higher risk of developing cervical cancer.

## AM I ELIGIBLE FOR HPV SCREENING?

The target age for screening varies from country to country, however the World Health Organization (WHO) does not recommend screening to start before age 25.

For more information on local HPV screening policies, including the ages for screening in your country, speak to your healthcare provider.

If you have had a total hysterectomy for reasons other than cancer you don't need to have cervical screening tests. If you have had normal screening results for several years, you may be screened less frequently.

## WHAT IF MY RESULTS AREN'T NORMAL— DOES THIS MEAN I HAVE CANCER?

Not at all. It is quite common to have results that show some cell abnormalities and there can be a number of reasons for this—it does not necessarily mean that you have cancer.

Healthcare providers usually classify results as either normal, unclear or abnormal. If the results are normal, no further action is required and you will be recalled for routine screening—usually every three to five years.

Unclear or inconclusive results normally mean that cells could be abnormal. There are a number of other potential causes such as pregnancy, the menopause, or an infection caused by something other than HPV. An HPV test will determine if the cell changes are caused by HPV.

It is normally necessary for women to repeat the test if they receive an unclear result. However, it is very common for minor changes to the cells to correct themselves in time and go back to normal without requiring any treatment.

An abnormal result means that the test did find changes to the cells on the cervix. This does not necessarily mean that someone has cervical cancer, but that there are changes to the cells which have been caused by HPV. These changes are usually classified as minor/low-risk or major/high-risk.

For women who receive a high-risk result, this normally means the cell changes are classified as precancerous and there is a high risk of developing cervical cancer, so these cells should be removed.

At this stage healthcare providers will discuss what your screening results mean and advise on the most appropriate next steps.

Cervical screening isn't 100% accurate all the time and it doesn't detect every case of cervical cancer. However, it is the best way to detect any abnormal changes early. The earlier cell changes are identified, the better the chances are of preventing cervical cancer from developing.

## WHAT IF I HAVE AN ABNORMAL SCREENING RESULT?

If you do receive an abnormal screening result it is likely that you will need to have additional tests such as colposcopy, VIA or cytology.

In a colposcopy a small microscope is used to examine the cervix in more detail. The healthcare professional doing the colposcopy may use dyes to stain the cells in the cervix to make it easier to see any changes to the cells. They may also take a small sample of the cervix (a biopsy) for further investigation. The procedure does not hurt, at most it might be a little uncomfortable but is very similar to having a pap/smear test.

The VIA procedure is similar to colposcopy, but it does not use a microscope, it is done by a visual assessment and evaluation of the cervix. As with the colposcopy, stains are often used to better observe any potential lesion(s) requiring treatment. Healthcare providers can treat the lesion immediately or refer you to another center, if additional evaluation is needed.

## HOW OFTEN SHOULD I HAVE A SCREENING TEST?

This will depend on the results of your screening test. If your results are normal, you will usually be invited to participate in cervical screening every three to five years.

Programs that use the more sensitive HPV testing often increase the frequency to at least 5 years for women who do not have any evidence of HPV infection. Women over age 30 with no screening test records have a much higher risk of developing cervical cancer.

## MY PARTNER AND I DON'T HAVE GENITAL WARTS - DO I STILL NEED TO BE SCREENED?

Yes! Most people with HPV don't know they have it because they don't have any symptoms. Genital warts are a visible sign of some types of HPV, but most types of HPV which can cause cancer, or the precancerous lesions, do not have any symptoms.

It is so important to participate in screening programmes if you are eligible and even if you feel completely healthy.

## I'VE HAD THE HPV VACCINE DO I STILL NEED TO BE SCREENED?

Yes. Vaccination significantly reduces your risk of developing cancer, but it doesn't completely prevent you from developing cervical cancer or other cancers caused by HPV. For more information, please see information leaflet: **"What You Need to Know about HPV: The Basics."**

If you are eligible, you should always attend cervical screenings.

## ARE THERE OTHER WAYS I CAN PROTECT MYSELF FROM HPV IF I'M NOT ELIGIBLE FOR SCREENING?

Only women have access to screening through cervical screening programmes. HPV can cause cancer in both men and women. For example, the incidence of anal cancer in gay men, is more prevalent than ever and increasing annually due to an increased spread in HPV. Despite this most people still associate HPV as something that only affects women.

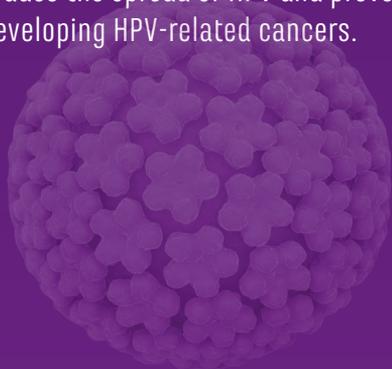
Whether you are a man or a woman it is very important to be vigilant for signs of HPV infection like genital warts and report these as soon as possible to your healthcare provider.

Together, by improving education and awareness, removing the stigma of HPV infection, and being aware of the link between HPV and certain cancers, it is possible to reduce the spread of the virus and prevent many new cancer cases globally.



## TO STOP HPV, START TALKING!

Possibly the best way to prevent HPV from spreading and reduce the incidence of HPV-related cancers is through talking about HPV. Raising awareness of the virus and talking about it with sexual partners and healthcare professionals can reduce the spread of HPV and prevent more people developing HPV-related cancers.



For more information about HPV and its related conditions visit [askabout HPV.com](https://askabout HPV.com) where you can download additional information resources on HPV.