

# Human papillomavirus (HPV) and Cancer

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## WHAT IS HPV?

HPV stands for human papilloma virus. HPV is a common sexually transmitted infection which usually has no symptoms and almost always goes away by itself. However, some types of HPV infection cause genital warts and other types can increase the risk of cancers in the genital and anal area.

## WHO GETS CANCER FROM HPV?

It is thought that the majority of sexually active individuals will be exposed to HPV infections during their lifetime. Most HPV infections will clear spontaneously. There are hundreds of HPV types and of these only a few are believed to increase the risk of developing cervical or anal cancer.

For gay/bisexual men, there is a slightly increased risk of developing anal cancer compared to the general population. This risk is higher in MSM with HIV.

However vaccination with Gardasil protects against the two high risk HPV types 16 and 18 which cause most genital and anal cancers and HPV 6 and 11 which cause most genital and anal warts.

## HOW DO YOU GET HPV?

HPV is spread by direct, skin-to-skin contact during vaginal or anal sex. Condoms reduce the chance of transmission.

## HOW WOULD I KNOW IF I HAD HPV OR GENITAL WARTS?

As of December 2017, the two yearly Pap test has been replaced by an HPV Cervical Screening test for those aged 25-74. The Cervical Screening Test detects HPV types and should be taken every 5 years if your results are normal. [Click here](#) for more information about the new screening program.

If you have genital warts you would most likely notice a lump or lumps in the genital or anal area. However sometimes people do not notice warts because they are inside the vagina or on the cervix or in the anus. You should go to a doctor or clinic if:

- You notice bumps, or skin changes on your penis, vagina, vulva or anus
- You notice any unusual itching, pain or bleeding
- Your sexual partner(s) tells you that they have HPV or genital warts.

## **HOW CAN HPV BE PREVENTED?**

GARDASIL is a safe and highly effective HPV vaccine that can prevent infection with the four HPV types, 6, 11, 16 and 18, which cause most genital warts and anal and genital cancers.

The vaccine is provided free in Australia to all year 7 school students, and currently through MSHC for young men, 26 years and under, who have sex with men.

### **DISCLAIMER:**

This fact sheet is designed to provide you with information on Human papillomavirus (HPV). It is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor. All clients are strongly advised to check with their doctor about any specific questions or concerns they may have. Every effort has been taken to ensure that the information in this pamphlet is correct at the time of printing.