

# HPV (human papillomavirus)



## Did you know?

- **Cervical cancer** affects about 13,000 women each year, and more than 4,000 of them die of the disease.
- **There is a virus that can lead to cervical cancer.** It's called HPV, which stands for *human papillomavirus*. It's a common virus passed on by genital contact.
- **There are about 40 different types of HPV that can cause genital infection.** Most are not serious and do not even cause any symptoms. Most come to an end in 1 to 2 years.
- **Some types of HPV can cause serious health problems** including
  - ~ Cervical cancer in women
  - ~ Other cancers of the genital area in women and men
  - ~ Genital warts in women and men

## How common is HPV?

HPV is very common. In fact, more than 50% of people who are sexually active will get HPV at some point in their lives. HPV is most common in young men and women in their late teens and early 20s. Because so many types of HPV have no symptoms, it is easily spread between sex partners.

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## How to prevent HPV

### Vaccine

A new vaccine recently approved by the Food and Drug Administration can prevent many, but not all HPV infections. The vaccine protects against 4 types of HPV—the types that cause 70% of cervical cancer and 90% of genital warts. Studies have found that the vaccine is almost 100% effective against the 4 types, is safe, and has very few side effects.

The vaccine (a 3-shot series) is recommended for females 11 to 12 years of age. This is because girls this age are usually not yet sexually active. It is also recommended for females between the ages of 13 and 26 years who have not been vaccinated, did not finish the 3-shot series, or are not yet sexually active.

Studies are now being done to find out if the vaccine works in women and men older than 26 years.

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## Other ways to prevent HPV

### Abstinence

The only sure way to prevent HPV is to abstain from all sexual activity. This is a good policy for teens and young adults. Adults can reduce their risk of HPV by limiting the number of partners they have.

### Condoms

Condoms do not completely prevent HPV because there is still some genital contact even when condoms are used. However, a condom should always be used because it can lower the risk of genital warts and cervical cancer as well as other sexually transmitted infections.

## Other ways to prevent cervical cancer

### Regular Pap tests

Regular Pap tests (also called Pap smears) are still an important way to prevent cervical cancer, *even for females who have had the HPV vaccine*. A Pap test is a simple test done in the doctor's office in which small amounts of cells are taken from the cervix and tested in a lab. Pap tests can detect cell changes in the cervix *caused by HPV* before they turn into cancer.

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