



HPV and Cancer Risk

At times, your care team may ask about your sexual history as part of your cancer risk. The reason is that the [Human Papilloma Virus or HPV](#) can cause some types of dysplasia, cancers of the [cervix](#), [vagina](#), [vulva](#), [penis](#), [anus](#), and [oral cavity](#) (most often the tongue, tonsils, or uvula).

HPV Facts

- There are over 200 types (strains) of HPV.
 - Some infect the skin or the genital area and cause warts, while others infect the genital area and can lead to cancer.
- HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI).
 - 80 to 85 out of 100 people are infected at some time in their lives.
- There is no treatment for HPV infection.
 - There is treatment for health problems that HPV cause, like genital warts and cervical pre-cancer.
 - In most cases, your body's immune system will clear the infection on its own.
 - However, for some, the infection will stay and may lead to cancer in the infected area.
- Researchers have found that [smoking](#) is one factor that makes it harder for the body to clear an HPV infection.

HPV and Sexual Health

HPV is often called a sexually transmitted infection, but you do not need to have intercourse to get HPV or give it to your partner. HPV can be passed during vaginal or anal penetration, oral sex, genital skin-to-skin sexual contact, or genital touching (masturbation), and other ways. Research is ongoing on all the ways HPV can spread.

What raises your risk of getting HPV?

Having a higher number of sexual partners and an earlier age of first sexual encounter may raise your exposure to HPV and your chances of being infected. Studies have found that anal sex can increase the risk of anal cancer. Oral sex (performed by or on either sex) can increase the risk of oral cancers.

What can I do to lower my risk of HPV infection?

Using a condom and/or dental dam (barrier method) may decrease the areas that are exposed. These barrier methods cannot totally prevent exposure since HPV can be found on other areas, like the scrotum, inner thigh, and vulva. It is important to know about HPV and safe sex. Other ways you can lower your risk are to:

- Have a [Pap test](#) done to check for any changes to your cervix and screen for cervical cancer, even if you are vaccinated.
- [Get vaccinated](#).
 - The HPV vaccine is recommended for all people ages 11 to 26.

- It is approved for use up to age 45, but most insurance companies won't cover the HPV vaccine beyond age 26.
- Talk to your healthcare provider about your risk factors and vaccination.
- Even if you already have HPV, you can still be vaccinated. The vaccine can protect you from other types of HPV.
- Visit your dentist regularly for oral cancer screenings. Finding HPV-related oral cancers early is important.

Resources for More Information

- [The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.](#)
- [Planned Parenthood.](#)
- [The National Cancer Institute.](#)
- Learn more about [anal cancer screening](#) for people at high risk.
- Learn more about [oral cancer screening](#).
- To learn about factors that could affect your cancer risk, use the [Reduce My Risk](#) tool.

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