

What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) infections are very common. There are more than 100 different types of HPV. Some HPVs cause warts on the hands and feet. Other HPVs are spread through sexual activities and may cause genital warts, infections or cancers; including cancer of the cervix (neck of the womb) and genitals, and the back of the throat. People who practice anal sex and become infected with HPV can develop anal cancer. There is a link between HPV, oral sex and cancers of the mouth and throat.

HPV is so common that most people who are sexually active will be infected by HPV at some time in their lives without even knowing it.

What are the symptoms?

Most people who are infected with HPV do not have any noticeable symptoms. A small number of people develop genital warts.

How is HPV spread?

HPV is spread through direct skin-to-skin contact during sexual touching and unprotected vaginal, oral, or anal sex with someone who has HPV.

How is HPV diagnosed?

- The Pap test is the most common test for detecting HPV infection and abnormal cells on the cervix.
- Genital warts can be diagnosed by your health-care provider based on your medical history and a physical examination.

Who is at risk of HPV infections?

You are more likely to get HPV if you:

- Don't use condoms or dental dams every time you have sex (vaginal, oral, or anal);
- Have more than one sex partner or your partner has had multiple sex partners;
- Have a weakened immune system that makes it hard for your body to fight off infection.

How can HPV infection be prevented?

- Get vaccinated. HPV vaccines are safe and effective and can protect against diseases (including cancers) caused by HPV. The vaccine is most effective if given before you are exposed to HPV (i.e. before you become sexually active). This is why the HPV vaccine is offered to New Brunswick children in Grade 7.
- Not all types of HPV are covered by the vaccines, so regular screening is recommended even if you have been immunized.



- Condoms can reduce some of the risk of getting HPV but they will not always cover the infected area as the virus can be anywhere on the genital or anal area. Use of dental dams during oral sex can also reduce the risk of HPV infection.

How is HPV infection treated?

- There is no cure against HPV, however your health care provider can provide you with information on the treatment options that are available for certain conditions.
- Once you have the virus, it stays in your body until it is eventually cleared by your immune system. Public Health recommends that all sexually active new Brunswickers are tested regularly for all sexually transmitted diseases at the same time. When you “test for one, test for all” you will be tested for gonorrhea, chlamydia, hepatitis, syphilis and HIV/AIDS.

Further Information

- For additional information, contact your healthcare provider, your local [Public Health office](#) or Tele-Care at 811.
- Public Health Agency of Canada www.phac-aspc.gc.ca