

## **HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV) DISEASE AND COLLEGE STUDENTS**

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. HPV is so common that nearly all sexually active men and women get it at some point in their lives. There are many different types of HPV. In 90 percent of cases, HPV goes away on its own and does not cause any health problems. But when HPV does not go away, it can cause health problems like genital warts and cancer.

HPV can cause cervical and other cancers including cancer of the vulva, vagina, penis, or anus. It can also cause cancer in the back of the throat, including the base of the tongue and tonsils (called oropharyngeal cancer). Cancer often takes years, even decades, to develop after a person gets HPV. The types of HPV that can cause genital warts are not the same as the types of HPV that can cause cancers.

There is no way to know which people who have HPV will develop cancer or other health problems. People with weak immune systems (including individuals with HIV/AIDS) may be less able to fight off HPV and more likely to develop health problems from it.

### **How is HPV infection spread?**

You can get HPV by having oral, vaginal, or anal sex with someone who has the virus. HPV can be passed even when an infected person has no signs or symptoms. Anyone who is sexually active can get HPV, even if you have had sex with only one person. You also can develop symptoms years after you have sex with someone who is infected making it hard to know when you first became infected.

### **How can I avoid HPV?**

You can do several things to lower your chances of getting HPV.

Get vaccinated - The HPV vaccine is safe and effective. It can protect males and females against diseases (including cancers) caused by HPV when given in the recommended age groups. It is important to get all the required doses to acquire the best protection.

Get screened for cervical cancer - Routine screening for women aged 21 to 65 years old can prevent cervical cancer.

If you are sexually active:

- Use latex condoms every time you have sex. This can lower your chances of getting HPV. Condoms may not give full protection against getting HPV because HPV can infect areas that are not covered by a condom.
- Be in a mutually monogamous relationship – or have sex only with someone who only has sex with you. People with only one lifetime sex partner can get HPV because it may not be possible to determine if a partner who has been sexually active in the past is currently infected.

### **What about the vaccine?**

All boys and girls should get vaccinated to protect against the types of HPV that most commonly cause health problems. The HPV vaccine is routinely given at 11 or 12 years of age, but it may be given beginning at ages 9 through 26 years. Most adolescents 9 through 14 years of age should get HPV vaccine as a two-dose series with the doses separated by 6–12 months. People who start HPV vaccination at 15 years of age and older should get the vaccine as a three-dose series with the second dose given 1–2 months after the first dose and the third dose given 6 months after the first dose. There are several exceptions to these age recommendations. Your health care provider can give you more information.

With any medication, including vaccines, there is a chance of side effects. These are usually mild and go away on their own, but serious reactions are also possible. Anyone who has ever had a life-threatening allergic reaction to any component of the vaccine, including yeast, or to a previous dose of HPV vaccine should not get the vaccine. HPV vaccine is not recommended for pregnant women. If you are moderately or severely ill, you should wait until you feel better to receive the vaccine. The most common reactions after receiving the vaccine are pain, redness or swelling at the injection site, mild fever, headache and fainting.

College students who decide to be vaccinated (or their parents if they are less than 18 years of age) should contact their health care provider or the student health center to inquire about receiving the vaccine.

For more information about the HPV vaccine, access the “Vaccine Information Statement” (VIS) at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website:

<https://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/vis/vis-statements/hpv.pdf>

Adapted material from the CDC website: <http://www.cdc.gov>