

# JANUARY IS CERVICAL HEALTH AWARENESS MONTH



## TEN THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT HPV AND CERVICAL CANCER

### HPV IS COMMON

Most sexually active individuals have HPV at some point. At any time there are approximately 79 million people in the U.S. with HPV.

### DIFFERENT TYPES

Some types of HPV can cause genital warts while some other, different types are linked to cervical cell changes that, if not detected early, can increase a woman's risk for cervical cancer. HPV also causes some cancers of the penis, anus, vagina, vulva, and throat. HPV infections are usually harmless, though, and most are cleared naturally by the body in a year or two.

### VACCINATION

HPV vaccines can help prevent infection from both high risk HPV types that can lead to cervical cancer and low risk types that cause genital warts. The CDC recommends all boys and girls get the HPV vaccine at age 11 or 12, but vaccination is available through age 26. The vaccine produces a stronger immune response when taken during the preteen years. For this reason, up until age 14, only two doses of the vaccine are required. Young women and men can get the vaccine up to age 26, but for those 15 and older, a full three-dose series is needed.

### TRANSMISSION

HPV is usually passed by genital-to-genital and genital-to-anal contact (even without penetration). The virus can also be transmitted by oral to genital contact, although this probably occurs less often. Studies show that male condoms can reduce HPV transmission to females, although condoms only protect the skin they cover.

### TESTING

A Pap test can find cell changes to the cervix caused by HPV. HPV tests find the virus and help healthcare providers know which women are at highest risk for cervical cancer. A Pap/HPV co-test is recommended for women 30 and over. One HPV test has been approved for use as primary cervical cancer screening for women age 25 and older, followed by a Pap test for women with certain results.

### TREATMENT

There's no treatment for the virus itself, but healthcare providers have plenty of options to treat diseases caused by HPV.

### RELATIONSHIPS

It can take weeks, months, or even years after exposure to HPV before symptoms develop or the virus is detected. This is why it is usually impossible to determine when or from whom HPV may have been contracted. A recent diagnosis of HPV does not necessarily mean anyone has been unfaithful, even in a long-term relationship spanning years.

### PREGNANCY

Pregnant women with HPV almost always have natural deliveries and healthy babies—it's very rare for a newborn to get HPV from the mother.

### THE EMOTIONAL SIDE

It can be upsetting when HPV is first diagnosed, but remember that having HPV is normal! It doesn't mean that anyone did something wrong, just that like most others they were exposed to a common infection. There are 14 million new HPV infections in the U.S. each year alone!

### FINDING SUPPORT

The American Sexual Health Association and the National Cervical Cancer Coalition have online support communities at Inspire.com that connect patients, partners, and caregivers. These are safe places where thousands of users find the information and support they need.



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[WWW.ASHASEXUALHEALTH.ORG](http://WWW.ASHASEXUALHEALTH.ORG)  
[WWW.NCCC-ONLINE.ORG](http://WWW.NCCC-ONLINE.ORG)

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