

HPV Prevention Week

October 1-7 2019



In 2017, Canada declared the world's first HPV Prevention Week. Held the first week of October, this movement aims to foster awareness about the human papillomavirus (HPV), empowering men and women across the country to learn how they can help protect themselves against HPV and HPV-related cancers and diseases.

Fast Facts about HPV:

1. HPV is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections in Canada and around the world.¹
2. It is estimated that as many as 75% of sexually active men and women will be infected with HPV at some point in their lives, regardless of lifestyle, but most people with healthy immune systems will eventually clear the infection from their bodies.¹
3. HPV is *not* a female-only virus. Recent data shows that more than 3,500 Canadians – 1/3 of them males – were diagnosed with HPV-related cancers in 2012.²

Who's at risk for HPV?

Anyone who has had sex is at risk for HPV. Because not all infections have noticeable symptoms – or any symptoms at all – men and women can be infected with and transmit HPV without knowing it.³

What health problems are associated with HPV?

HPV can cause a number of health problems, including genital warts and several types of cancer. High-risk HPV infection is the cause of almost all cervical cancers in women, however HPV is also associated with a number of other cancers, including:

- 80-90% of anal cancers;
- 25 – 35% of oropharyngeal (throat and mouth) cancers;
- Cancers of the reproductive tract, such as vulvar and vaginal cancers as well as penile cancers.⁴

What are the symptoms of HPV?

- One sign of an HPV infection is anogenital warts (also called condylomata) – they can be flat or look like a small cauliflower. However, many people with HPV will have no obvious signs of infection as warts can be too small to be seen or occur inside the body.
- *In women*, the cervix is a common site for an HPV infection, however warts may appear on the vulva, thigh, anus, rectum, or in the vagina or urethra.
- *In men*, warts may appear on the thigh, anus, rectum, penis, scrotum, or in the urethra.¹

Steps you can take to help

1. First, educate yourself about HPV, how it's transmitted and how you can help protect yourself.
2. Talk to your doctor about HPV vaccinations – the vaccines appear to be safe and effective to help protect against the most common types of HPV. However, side effects and allergic reactions may occur, and HPV vaccines do not protect against all HPV types.¹
3. Even if you've been vaccinated, continue to visit your doctor for regular screenings. (Pap tests). Pap tests do not prevent HPV, but when changes in cervical cells are found early, they can often be treated effectively before they become dangerous - regular Pap testing can reduce cervical cancer deaths by 70%.⁵
4. Finally, if you receive any abnormal test results take immediate action to address them, it doesn't necessarily mean you have cancer. There are several potential causes for abnormal results. Most abnormal cells on the cervix that are detected by a Pap test will clear without any treatment or it can take some years for cancer to develop after an abnormal Pap test. If you have abnormal cells that could be related to cancer, you will be referred to a colposcopy clinic for further evaluation and treatment.⁶

More prevention tools

Canadians can and should take immediate action to help protect themselves from contracting HPV and developing related diseases:

- If you are sexually active, use latex condoms every time you have sex. However, it's important to know that HPV can infect areas not covered by a condom, so they may not fully protect you against HPV during sexual contact.⁶
- Limit your number of sexual partners to help reduce the risk of HPV transmission.
- Quit smoking – smoking makes the body less able to fight off HPV infection.
- Not all HPV infections lead to cancer, though regular cervical screenings are important to help prevent cervical cancer.¹
- Health Canada has authorized three vaccines to help prevent infections from different / various types of HPV.¹
- Even if you are infected with one type of HPV, vaccination can help protect you against other strains of the virus that you have not been exposed to.¹
- It is important to remember that, even if you have been vaccinated, you are still at risk for strains of HPV not covered by the vaccines, vaccination does not protect everyone, and you may have already been exposed to HPV before getting vaccinated. This is why it's so important to practice safe sex and for women to have regular Pap tests.¹

To learn more about HPV prevention visit www.canadavshpv.ca and join the conversation online using #CANADAvshpv

¹ Government of Canada, 2017. Human Papillomavirus (HPV). Available online: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/human-papillomavirus-hpv.html> (accessed June 2018)

² Canadian Cancer Society, 2016. Media backgrounder #: HPV-associated cancers. Available online: <http://www.cancer.ca/en/about-us/for-media/media-releases/national/2016/cancer-statistics-background-1/?region=on> (accessed July 2018)

³ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017. HPV and Men – CDC Fact Sheet. Available online: <https://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/hpvandmen-fact-sheet-february-2012.pdf> (accessed July 2018)

⁴ Canadian Cancer Society. HPV and cancer. Available online: <http://www.cancer.ca/en/prevention-and-screening/reduce-cancer-risk/make-informed-decisions/get-vaccinated/hpv-and-cancer/?region=on> (accessed July 2018)

⁵ The Society of Obstetricians and Gynecologists of Canada, 2018. Public Education Pamphlets. Available online: <https://sogc.org/publications-resources/public-information-pamphlets.html?id=19>

⁶ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2017. Genital HPV Infection – Fact Sheet. Available online: <https://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/stdfact-hpv.htm> (accessed June 2018)

