



District Health Department #10
Family Planning

Women and HPV

What is HPV?

HPV stands for Human Papillomavirus which is a group of more than 100 different strains of virus, 30 of which are sexually transmitted. Genital HPV is a sexually transmitted disease that can affect both men and women. It is transmitted through genital or anal contact. Some of these viruses are called “high risk” types and may cause abnormal pap tests which in some cases can lead to cancer. By age 50 at least 80% of women will have acquired genital HPV infection.

What are the symptoms of HPV in women?

Most women who have HPV do not even know they are infected. Some women develop genital warts or precancerous changes in the cervix, vulva, or anus. Genital warts can be diagnosed through visible inspection however, any changes in a women’s cervix must be assessed through a pap test performed by a health care provider.



Is HPV Treatable?

There is no “cure” for HPV, although in most women the infection goes away on its own. Treatment can be provided for symptoms of HPV such as genital warts and precancerous cells. Genital warts can be removed through the use of medication and various other procedures. If precancerous changes in the cervix are found, treatment will be determined by a health care provider.

What if I don’t get treated?

In most women the infection goes away on its own. A persistent infection of “high risk” HPV however, puts you at greater risk for cervical cancer. Women also need to be aware that they can unknowingly transmit HPV to their sexual partners even if no symptoms are present.

How can I prevent HPV?

The only 100% sure way to prevent getting an STD, including HPV, is to abstain from having sexual intercourse. You can also lower your risk of getting the disease by limiting your number of sexual partners of having only one uninfected sexual partner. Condoms may provide some but not complete protection against HPV and are only beneficial when used consistently and correctly.



* There is now a vaccine available to protect women from certain types of HPV that are most likely to cause cervical cancer.