

HPV Myths vs. Facts

Myth: The only people at risk for HPV are those who have casual sex with multiple partners.

FACT: At least half of sexually active individuals will have at least one HPV infection in their lifetime. Both men and women can be infected with HPV or transmit it while in a monogamous relationship. Those with HPV can have it and spread it without knowing it. HPV can result in genital warts for both men and women, and anyone can develop cancer from HPV infection, although only women can develop cervical cancer.

Myth: If I've always used condoms, I'm not at risk for HPV.

FACT: Used correctly, condoms are very effective against sexually transmitted infections such as gonorrhea and HIV that are spread through bodily fluids. However, **they are less protective against STDs that spread through skin-to-skin contact, such as HPV and herpes.** While using condoms significantly decreases the risk of catching HPV, it doesn't completely protect you.

Myth: HPV won't happen to me.

FACT: HPV is a very common infection spread easily by skin-skin contact. While most cases of HPV are sexually transmitted, even people who've never had sexual intercourse can get HPV. Infected people shed the HPV virus from their genital region, so if your genitals are touching your partner's genitals, you can catch the infection, even if you're not having intercourse.

Myth: If your partner tested negative for sexually transmitted infections, your partner doesn't have HPV.

FACT: Routine testing for STDs includes tests for HIV, syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, hepatitis B & C, and sometimes herpes. **Providers may not test for HPV**, even in women, unless an abnormal result on a Pap test occurs.

Myth: The HPV vaccine has dangerous side effects.

FACT: The HPV vaccine is a safe, FDA-approved drug. In clinical tests, common side effects include **pain, redness or swelling and possible fainting.** The vaccine is available to young women and men aged nine to 26 to prevent strains of cervical cancer in women and help protect against 90 percent of genital warts in men. The vaccine not only prevents someone from becoming infected with HPV, it also prevents them from transmitting it to others.

Key Background Resources:

Centers for Disease Control Fact Sheet

<http://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/>

Planned Parenthood Facts on HPV and HPV Vaccine

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/stds-hiv-safer-sex/hpv-4272.htm>

<http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/stds-hiv-safer-sex/hpv-vaccine-19345.htm>