

Basic Facts About HPV and HPV Vaccines: What Young Men Should Know!



750 Morton Blvd. Hazard, KY 41701 (606) 439-3557
<http://www.mc.uky.edu/ruralhealth/rcpc.asp>

Don't Be Misled!

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus in men, especially those under age 25 engaging in sex. In fact, most sexually active men and women in the United States will have HPV at some point in their lives.

The virus is only transmitted through sex or through the foreplay (touching of one another's genitals) that occurs before sex. The virus is spread through oral sex, penile-vaginal sex, penile-anal sex, and mutual masturbation. The virus is usually not harmful to males and will likely go away on its own; however, several exceptions are important:

- ✓ Over 40 different types of HPV can be spread during sex or foreplay.
- ✓ Since HPV usually causes no symptoms, most men and women can get HPV and pass it onto their partners without knowing it.
- ✓ There is no test designed or approved to find HPV in men. In addition, there is no treatment or cure for HPV, but there are ways to treat the health problems caused by HPV in men.
- ✓ Two types (type 6 and type 11) cause about 90% of all genital warts (see picture) and genital warts are the most common sexually transmitted disease in the United States.

- ✓ Signs of genital warts include one or more raised, flat, or cauliflower-shaped growths on the penis, testicles, groin, thighs, or anus. Warts may appear within weeks or months after sexual contact with an infected partner.
- ✓ Another type of HPV (type 16) has also been linked with oral and throat cancers as well as cancer of the penis and anus. Although these cancers are relatively rare, each would occur far less often if men were protected against infection by HPV type 16.



Two types of HPV (types 16 and 18) cause most cases of cervical cancer in the United States. The cervix is the opening to a woman's uterus so this kind of cancer is not a direct threat to men. However, it is quite clear that young men who take the time to be vaccinated against these two types of HPV are protecting their female sex partners from a virus that could potentially lead to cancer and the removal of their uterus (also known as a hysterectomy), therefore jeopardizing these women's reproductive health. In some cases, cervical cancer leads to death, thus young men have an opportunity to help prevent this loss of life.



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The HPV Vaccine Is Available For Men!

In 2009, the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved the use of Gardasil for males 9 through 26 years of age. Several key points about this vaccine are:

- ✓ Gardasil provides excellent protection against genital warts. Although these warts are not painful, they can be embarrassing for many young men.
- ✓ Gardasil probably provides young men with a substantial amount of protection against HPV type 16 which means their risk of oral, throat, penis, and anal cancers declines. For young men who have any sexual contact with other males this protective value of Gardasil is especially valuable.
- ✓ Gardasil is an extremely safe vaccine.
- ✓ The vaccine is given in three doses – it is very important that you return for the second and third doses. Researchers do not know how effective the vaccine is for men who do not receive all three doses.
- ✓ The vaccine does not prevent other sexually transmitted diseases and does not treat HPV infection, genital warts, or cancer.



What About Condoms?

Because HPV is so common and usually invisible, the only sure way to avoid infection is to not have sex. However, because evidence suggests genital warts are easily spread during sexual contact, condom use may reduce this risk. The virus is unlikely to pass through a latex condom. This means that the parts of your penis (the head and the shaft) that are covered by the condom are well protected against the virus. It also means that parts of your genitals (the scrotum and the very bottom part of the penile shaft) are largely unprotected from the virus only because condoms do not cover these areas. The conclusion then is the latex condoms offer valuable – but not complete – protection against getting HPV from a sex partner.

The key point to think about, however, is that condoms also offer protection against another common virus that is transmitted through sex: genital herpes. In addition, condoms offer excellent protection against several other common sexually transmitted diseases such as gonorrhea, Chlamydia, and even HIV. You should also know that condoms, when used consistently and correctly, are an excellent method of preventing pregnancy.

What Can You Do Now?

The Rural Cancer Prevention Center (RCPC) can help you find a healthcare provider who can give you Gardasil. The RCPC can also help you determine whether you can qualify to have the vaccine paid for by insurance. In many cases the RCPC can provide the vaccine to you at no cost. For more information, please contact us at: (606) 439-3557 ext. 83680 or <http://www.mc.uky.edu/ruralhealth/rcpc.asp>.

