What is HPV and how can it affect my health?

HPV (human papillomavirus) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI). Intimate, skin-to-skin contact is responsible for the transmission of HPV. Nearly all sexually active men and women will have sexually transmitted HPV at some point in their lifetime. For the majority of men who have HPV, their immune system will clear their body of the infection. For others, HPV may persist and result in:

- anogenital warts
- precancers
- anal cancer
- oropharynx cancer
- penile cancer
- transmission of HPV to intimate partners

Did you know?

3 out of 4 people diagnosed with oral cancer are men and around 70% of oropharyngeal cancers are linked to HPV.

How do I know I have HPV?

Nearly all adult men and women will have HPV in their lifetime, although this will hopefully change as more boys and girls are vaccinated against HPV. For most individuals, HPV has no symptoms and infected individuals are unaware that they have the infection. Since the 1940’s, women have been regularly screened for HPV. Unfortunately, there is no standard test or screening process to detect HPV in men. However, individuals with the below risk factors may want to consult their providers regarding screening options.

What can I do so I don’t catch HPV?

There is no cure for HPV, but there are steps males and their parents can take to reduce their chances of contracting the virus.

Vaccination is key in a person’s fight against HPV. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and American Academy of Pediatrics recommends routine HPV vaccination for girls and boys ages 11-12 in the US. (For more information on Vaccination, please see our Vaccination Fact Sheets). Gardasil and Gardasil 9 are approved in the US for use in males starting at 9 and up to 26 years old, if not previously vaccinated.

In the UK, following efforts by HPV Action (co-founded by our Foundation), boys will receive the HPV vaccine in September 2019 although at present this is only for 12/13 year olds. The JCVI recommended that the HPV vaccine also be offered to men who have sex with men (MSM) aged 14-60 who identify themselves at sexual health clinics (‘GUM’ clinics). This is still at the
recommendation stage and it does not seem as though the vaccination is being offered to men at
these clinics at this point in time.

The younger a person is vaccinated, the more effective the vaccine. This is because a person who is
vaccinated at a younger age has a higher immune response, as well as a higher likelihood they have
not already been exposed to the virus. Individuals in this age group and parents of young
individuals in this age group should talk to their provider about the vaccine.

While condoms do not fully protect one from HPV, sexually active individuals should use barrier
methods (i.e., condoms and dental dams) during every sex act, every time. Because HPV is
transmitted through skin-to-skin contact, areas left exposed while wearing a condom during sexual
activity are vulnerable to HPV transmission.

If an individual notices any changes on his genitals or anus as far as growths, blisters, warts, or
other skin abnormalities, he should consult his physician immediately. For more information on
HPV, HPV-related cancer and vaccination, please visit our website at:

For a glossary of terms, please see our Common HPV and Anal Cancer Terms page.

These fact sheets were reviewed by an oncologist and nurse.