

Human Papillomavirus (Hpv)

What Is Hpv?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a very common virus that affects the skin and mucous membranes lining your body, such as those in your cervix, anus, mouth, and throat. Most of us (8 in 10 people) will be infected with HPV at some point in their lives, often without knowing it. HPV is usually harmless and goes away on its own, but some types can cause serious health issues, including cervical cancer.

How Is Hpv Spread?

HPV is primarily spread through intimate skin-to-skin contact. This includes:

- **Sexual contact:** Vaginal, anal, oral sex, touching the genital area or sharing sex toys with someone who has the virus.
- **Close skin contact:** HPV can be passed even when an infected person shows no signs or symptoms.

It's important to note that HPV can be transmitted even when using condoms, as they do not cover all the skin that may carry the virus. However, condoms can significantly reduce the risk of transmission.

Types Of Hpv

There are over 100 types of HPV, but they can be broadly categorised into two groups:

- **Low-risk HPV:** These types can cause genital warts but are not linked to cancer.
- **High-risk HPV:** These types are associated with various cancers, particularly cervical cancer. The most common high-risk types are HPV 16 and HPV 18.

Symptoms Of Hpv

In many cases, HPV does not cause any symptoms. The immune system clears HPV within 2 years in 9 out of 10 people. However, depending on the type, HPV can cause:

- **Genital warts:** Small growths or lumps in the genital area, caused by low-risk HPV types.
- **Abnormal cervical cells:** High-risk HPV types can cause changes in the cells of the cervix, which can lead to cervical cancer if not detected and treated early.

Hpv And Cervical Cancer

HPV is the leading cause of cervical cancer. The virus can cause changes in the cervical cells, which may develop into cancer over time if left untreated. Regular cervical screening (smear tests) is essential as it can detect abnormal cells early, before they have a chance to turn into cancer.

Hpv Testing

HPV testing is now a routine part of cervical screening in the UK. During your smear test, a sample of cells is taken from your cervix and tested for high-risk HPV types. If HPV is found, the same sample is checked for abnormal cells. If both are present, further tests or treatment may be recommended.

Hpv Vaccination

The HPV vaccine is a safe and effective way to protect against the most common high-risk types of HPV. In the UK, the HPV vaccine is offered to girls and boys aged 12 to 13 years as part of the NHS vaccination programme. It's also available to those who missed it in school up to the age of 25.

Managing Hpv

You can't completely protect against HPV. But there are ways you can reduce your risk of getting HPV or developing a persistent infection that your immune system can't get rid of:

- **Routine screening:** Regular cervical screening is the best way to monitor and manage HPV. If you're aged 25-64, you should attend your smear tests as recommended.
- **Have the HPV vaccine:** If you are eligible, the HPV vaccine protects against high-risk HPV types that are linked to 7 in 10 cervical cancers
- **Healthy lifestyle:** Maintaining a healthy immune system can help your body clear the virus. This includes a balanced diet, regular exercise, and avoiding smoking. In the UK, smoking is linked to about 2 in 10 cervical cancers. Smoking weakens your immune system, making it less able to get rid of HPV.
- **Safe sex:** Condoms and dental dams protect the genitalia and oral cavity, reducing the risk of transmission. However they don't offer complete protection against HPV which also lives on the skin around the genitalia.

Hpv And Relationships

If you or your partner has been diagnosed with HPV, it's important to understand that:

- **HPV is common:** Nearly everyone will have HPV at some point, and in most cases, it does not cause any health problems.
- **No need for panic:** Having HPV does not mean you or your partner will develop cancer. Regular screening and monitoring are key to managing any potential risks.

- **Open communication:** Discussing HPV with your partner can help you both understand the condition and make informed decisions about your sexual health.

Why Choose The Birmingham Gynaecology Clinic?

At Birmingham Gynaecology Clinic, we provide you with the highest quality of care and comprehensive information about HPV and its implications. Our team is here to support you with expert advice, routine screening, and any necessary follow-up care.

Contact Us

If you have any concerns about HPV or need more information, don't hesitate to contact us today. Our expert team ensure you receive the best possible treatment and guidance.