

Wellness Wednesday Blog

What is HPV? Ahem, calling all parents of teens! Here is some info you *want* to know. HPV is the most common STD in the United States, and it stands for Human Papilloma Virus. It can be transmitted by *many* types of intimate skin to skin contact. There are several different types of this virus, a few of which can cause cervical cancer in females and cancer of the throat in males. Every year, high risk types of HPV, including types 16 and 18, cause about 36,000 cases of cancer in males and females in the United States. Cancer from HPV can take years to decades to develop. There is no way to determine which individuals are more likely to develop cancer, and who will likely clear the infection without health complications. Most people who are infected with the virus do not have symptoms and may not ever know they had HPV. However, they can pass it on to others who may go on to develop symptoms. Cervical Cancer screenings are recommended to start at age 21. But actual testing for HPV is only available for women 30 years or older.

HPV also causes genital warts. These are flesh colored bumps often leading to itching, mild bleeding, irritation, and discomfort. These warts not only affect the genitals but can also affect the lips, mouth, tongue, and throat. It can take weeks to months to develop after transmission. Some people may carry the virus without visible warts and spread it to partners. The types of HPV that cause warts do not cause cancer.

Unfortunately, about 13 million Americans, including the adolescent population, are infected with HPV each year.

More about the Cancers: Cervical cancer is well known as being connected to HPV and it causes about 4,000 deaths a year in women. Did you know that there are other cancers that can occur from this virus? This includes cancer of the genitals and anus which would affect both males and females. It also causes throat cancer which overwhelmingly affects males, currently at about the same rate per year as cervical cancer affects females. We can detect the type of HPV that causes cervical cancer via early screenings. But we cannot use early detection for other types of HPV which cause other types of cancers.

So what can be done about HPV? There is a vaccine that prevents cancer, and it is the HPV vaccine. The vaccine initially became available in the United States in 2006. The options for HPV vaccines have expanded and covers nine types of HPV including 16 and 18.

It is given as a 3-dose series for those who are 15 and older. For ages 9 to 14, it can be given as a 2-dose series. CDC guidelines recommend starting this vaccine at age 11. The vaccine is very safe. Side effects include those common to vaccination in general. There may be pain, redness and swelling at the injection site, headache, nausea and feeling faint. Fainting after receiving vaccination is more common with adolescents.

Now, let's look at the numbers! It is very effective. Studies show that infections with HPV types that cause genital warts and cancers have dropped by 88% in teen females and 81% in teen males. This vaccine can prevent over 90% of cancers caused by HPV. **Now that is significant!**

[HPV Infection | Human Papillomavirus \(HPV\) | CDC](#)

[Human Papillomavirus \(HPV\) Test: MedlinePlus Medical Test](#)

[HPV Vaccine Recommendations | Pediatrics | American Academy of Pediatrics \(aap.org\)](#)

[Cancers Caused by HPV | Human Papillomavirus \(HPV\) | CDC](#)

[Genital Warts: HPV, STD, Symptoms, Causes, Treatment \(clevelandclinic.org\)](#)