

Human Papillomavirus (HPV): Care Instructions

Your Care Instructions

The human papillomavirus (HPV) is a very common virus. There are many types of HPV. Some types cause the common skin wart. Other types cause genital warts, which can be spread by sexual contact. Some types can increase the risk for cervical and anal cancer. Having one type of HPV does not lead to having another type.

Many women who have HPV may not know that they are infected until it is found with a Pap test. Your doctor uses this test to look for abnormal cells on your cervix. If you have had an abnormal Pap test, your doctor may recommend that you have an HPV test.

Like a Pap test, an HPV test is done on a sample of cells collected from the cervix. If the test finds that you have the types of HPV that might lead to cancer, your doctor may suggest more tests. This does not mean that you will develop cancer; it means that you may have an increased risk. Abnormal cell changes caused by HPV often go away on their own. If the changes do not go away, they can be treated. But because HPV can stay inside the body, the abnormal cervical cells sometimes come back. This is why it is important to follow up with your doctor and have regular Pap tests.

Follow-up care is a key part of your treatment and safety. Be sure to make and go to all appointments, and call your doctor if you are having problems. It's also a good idea to know your test results and keep a list of the medicines you take.

How can you care for yourself at home?

- If you are going to have a Pap or HPV test, do not douche or use tampons or vaginal creams in the 24 hours before the test.
- Do not smoke. Smoking increases the risk for cervical problems and abnormal Pap tests. If you need help quitting, talk to your doctor about stop-smoking programs and medicines. These can increase your chances of quitting for good.
- Use latex condoms every time you have sex. Use them from the beginning to the end of sexual contact.
- Be sure to tell your sexual partner or partners that you have HPV. Even if you do not have symptoms, you can still pass HPV to others.
- Having one sex partner (who does not have STIs and does not have sex with anyone else) is a good way to avoid STIs.

When should you call for help?

Watch closely for changes in your health, and be sure to contact your doctor if:

- You have vaginal pain during or after sex.
- You have vaginal bleeding when you are not in your menstrual period.

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