

Oral Health and HPV

What Is HPV?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a virus that can infect your skin, mouth, penis, vagina, cervix, and anus. If HPV infects your mouth, it could put you at risk for mouth or throat cancer. Some research suggests that smoking and heavy drinking can increase the risk that oral HPV will turn into cancer. It is important to discuss your risk of HPV and oral health with both your dentist and primary health care professional (physician, nurse practitioner, physician assistant).

How Are Oral Health and HPV Linked?

- HPV is spread through oral sex. If your partner is infected with genital HPV and you perform oral sex, you risk getting HPV.
- Having oral sex with many partners increases your risk for oral HPV.

How Can I Prevent Oral HPV?

- HPV can be spread even when an infected person has no signs or symptoms. The best way to protect yourself is to always use condoms and dental dams with all partners. A dental dam is a small, thin piece of latex that can be used for protection during oral sex.
- The HPV vaccine protects you against other types of HPV. It is recommended for most people, both male and female, ages 11 through 26. Talk to your health care professional about the HPV vaccine.
- It's possible that the HPV vaccine will help protect you from oral HPV, but more studies need to be done. For more information on the HPV vaccine, go to: www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/hpv/



What Are the Warning Signs of HPV?

Many times, the HPV virus does not cause any symptoms. The virus could cause warts or sores in the mouth. Mouth or throat cancer could also develop because of HPV infection. The symptoms of mouth or throat cancer can include:

- Ulcers or sores in the mouth that don't heal
- Difficult or painful swallowing
- Pain when chewing
- A sore throat or hoarse voice that doesn't go away
- A swelling or lump in the mouth or neck
- A numb feeling in the mouth or lips
- Constant coughing
- An earache on one side that lasts for more than a few days



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How Are These Problems Treated?

- It is important to protect yourself from HPV to prevent future health problems.
- There is currently no cure for oral HPV. Viruses, like HPV, do not respond to antibiotics. HPV infection usually goes away on its own but can still be spread, even if you have no symptoms.
- There may be certain medicines or treatments that heal oral warts and lesions.
- Limit alcohol and quit smoking to reduce the risk for cancer. If the infection becomes mouth or throat cancer, treatments like surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation are options. You and your primary health care professional will decide on the best treatment option for you.

Questions for My Primary Health Care Professional

- Do I need the HPV vaccine?
- How can I be tested for HPV?
- If I have had oral HPV, how can I reduce my cancer risk?
- How will I know that I have oral HPV when there may not be symptoms?
- After my symptoms go away, can I spread oral HPV to my partner?
- How can I protect my partner from getting HPV?
- Will HPV ever go away?
- Will you examine my mouth at my primary health visits?
- You're not a dentist—why is it important for you to examine my mouth?

For More Information

- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):**
www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/stdFact-HPVandoralcancer.htm
- **National Cancer Institute:**
www.cancer.gov/about-cancer/causes-prevention/risk/infectious-agents/hpv-fact-sheet

Notes:
