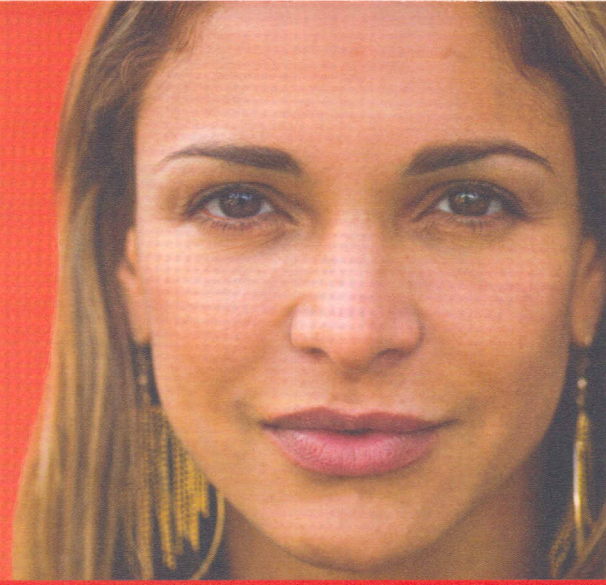


PAP  
SCREENING  
for Life

# HPV

## FACT SHEET



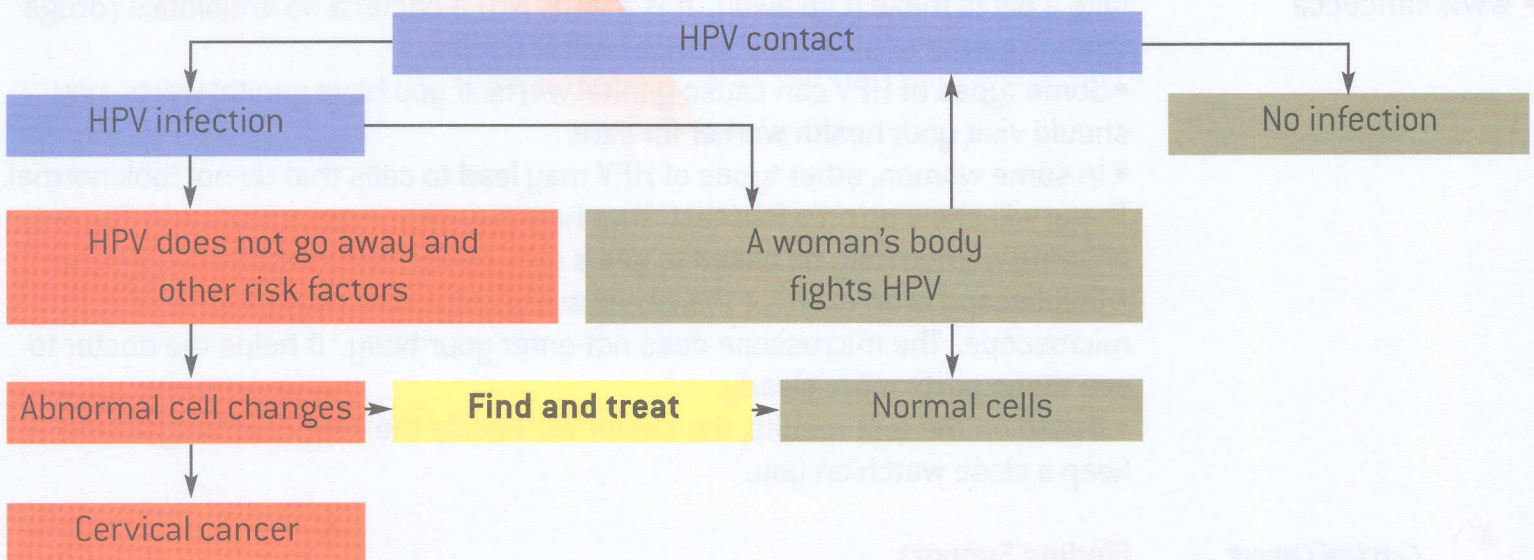
## What is HPV?

**Human Papillomavirus** [pap-ill-o'-ma] virus or **HPV** is a widely found virus (a tiny germ that can make a person sick). There are over 100 types of HPV. About 40 types of HPV may live in the genital area (the private part of your body, vulva, penis and scrotum covered by boxer shorts or underwear) of men and women.

HPV is the number one sexually transmitted infection (STI) that is passed on to others. If 100 people had sex, 75 will be at risk of getting this virus at some time in their lives.

Most often HPV does not cause any signs or harm and goes away on its own. But, some types of HPV may cause:

- Genital and/or anal warts
- Changes to the cells on the inside of your body (vagina, cervix, and rectum) that don't look normal.
- Cancer, over time, if the changes in the cells are not found and treated.



### How can I lower my chances of getting cancer of the cervix due to HPV?

1. Delay sex. You are more likely to come in contact with HPV and get this virus if you have sex at an early age.
2. Limit your number of sexual partners.
3. Prevent skin-to-skin contact. Always use latex (a rubber made from plants) or polyurethane condoms and dental dams during sex. You are less likely to contact the virus by using these.
4. If you have sex, get a Pap. Ask your health care provider when you need your next Pap. Find changes to the cervix before they turn into cancer.

(over)

## What is HPV?

How can I lower my chances of getting cancer of the cervix due to HPV? (continued )

5. Get the HPV vaccine. This vaccine will give you the best protection if you get it *before* you start having sex. Even if you have had sex, the vaccine may still be a good choice for you. Talk with your health worker.
6. Don't smoke. If you smoke, you are about twice as likely as non-smokers to get cancer of the cervix. If you stop smoking now, you can greatly lower your chance of getting cancer of the cervix.
7. Keep your immune system (your body's way of protecting itself from illness) healthy.

### Ways to boost your immune system

- Choose not to smoke
- Eat well
- Be active
- Reduce stress
- Get a good nights sleep

### How is HPV spread?

You can get the virus by skin-to-skin touching even without having sex. HPV lives on the skin of people who have the virus, not in their spit, blood, sperm, vaginal fluid or urine. The virus may be found in any part of the genitals of both men and women.

### How is HPV found?

Most women will have a Pap test and or genital exam that is not normal. During a Pap test, the doctor takes cells from the cervix, puts them on a slide, and looks at them under a microscope. Ask your health worker for your Pap test results. It may take a few weeks to get the results. There is a test for this virus, but it can't be done in Nova Scotia at this time.

### Helpful websites:

- [www.hpvinfo.ca](http://www.hpvinfo.ca)
- [www.cdc.gov/std/hpv](http://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv)
- [www.cancer.ca](http://www.cancer.ca)

### How is HPV treated?

- Most times the virus will clear up by itself. The body's immune system helps to fight it off.
- For HPV infections that do not clear on their own, there is no cure. You can't take a pill to make it go away. It is a virus NOT a bacteria so antibiotics (drugs that kill germs or slow their growth) will NOT kill it.
- Some types of HPV can cause genital warts. If you have genital warts, you should visit your health worker for care.
- In some women, other types of HPV may lead to cells that do not look normal. These will show up on a Pap test. Your health worker may repeat your Pap test or some women may be asked to see a special doctor for a colposcopy test.
- Colposcopy is an exam of the cervix and genital area using a special microscope. The microscope does not enter your body. It helps the doctor to see these parts more clearly.
- Based on the test results, the doctor will decide the best care for you and keep a close watch on you.

### Finding Support

If you have questions or concerns about HPV, or your care plan, talk to your health worker. They may also be able to help you to learn more about your feelings about HPV and/or genital warts.

If you change your health worker, it is a good idea to tell them about any Pap test that was not normal or treatments you have received.



Questions?

Call NS Cervical  
Cancer Prevention  
Program

**1-888-480-8588**  
or Canadian Cancer  
Society  
**1-888-939-3333**

[www.cancercare.ns.ca](http://www.cancercare.ns.ca)