



Human papillomavirus (HPV). The facts.

What is human papillomavirus (HPV)?

- HPV is a common virus that 4 out of 5 (80%) of us will get at some time during our lives.
- There are over 200 different types of HPV. Around 40 types affect the genital area:
 - Some do not cause cervical cancer, but can cause skin conditions like genital warts.
 - About 13 types are linked to cancer. These types are called **high-risk HPV**.

High-risk HPV and cervical cancer

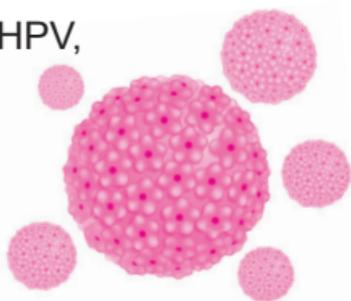
- Almost all cases of cervical cancer (99.7%) are caused by high-risk HPV.
- A persistent high-risk HPV infection can cause the cells of the cervix to change. These changes are called abnormalities. If abnormalities get worse, they may develop into cervical cancer.
- As well as cervical cancer, high-risk HPV can cause other cancers, including anal, vulval, vaginal, and some head and neck cancers.

We have lots more information and support on HPV, cervical screening, cervical abnormalities and cervical cancer, including:

- our website with up-to-date information written and reviewed by experts – visit jostrust.org.uk
- an online Ask The Expert service, where you can submit any questions
- an online forum to share your experiences
- a dedicated Helpline on **0808 802 8000**
- a wide range of information resources, like the one you are reading.

How do people get HPV?

- High-risk HPV can be passed on through skin-to-skin contact, including:
 - oral, anal or vaginal sex
 - touching in the genital area
 - sharing sex toys.
- Anyone who has any type of sexual contact can get HPV – it's not just about penetrative sex!
- You can get HPV the first time you have sex.
- Your immune system usually gets rid of HPV within 2 years. High-risk HPV does not have symptoms, so most people never know they have it.
- Sometimes your immune system can't get rid of HPV and it stays in the body. This is called a persistent infection.
- There is no treatment for HPV, which can be worrying. But going for cervical screening (a smear test) when invited means any changes caused by HPV can be found early.



Reduce your risk of a persistent HPV infection

- **Stop smoking.** Smoking weakens your immune system, making it less able to get rid of HPV.
- **Have safe sex.** Using condoms and dental dams help reduce your risk, but HPV lives on the skin in the whole genital area, not just the part you cover.
- **Have the HPV vaccine.** If you are eligible, the HPV vaccine protects against high-risk HPV 16 and 18 that cause 70% of all cervical cancers and low-risk HPV 6 and 11 that cause 90% of genital warts.

0808 802 8000

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Jo's Cervical Cancer Trust, 2018. Version 3.0. Reviewed June 2018. Next review 2021. The information in this factsheet was correct at the time of publication. For references, email publications@jostrust.org.uk