

Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

HPV is a common virus that is almost always caught by sexual intercourse. It can exist in more than 80 types. About eight out of ten adults have had the infection at some time and it rarely causes any symptoms. However five in 100 women with the infection have abnormal smears and one to two in 100 women will develop pre-cancerous cells which in a few women may progress to cervical cancer despite regular smears.

Although HPV is sexually transmitted it is not a sexually transmitted disease that requires a visit to a sexual health clinic. Some abnormal smears with mild changes may not be due to HPV but most abnormal smears are due to the effects of HPV on the cervix. There is no blame to attach to your current partner, or any other partner, or to yourself.

Are there any tests for HPV?

We are currently not routinely screening for HPV, however smear tests will detect abnormal cell changes that HPV can occasionally produce. There is currently research being carried out about HPV testing and it is possible that it will be offered in the future.

Do I need more smears?

The timing of your smears will be discussed with you and is usually tailored according to the colposcopy findings.

Does HPV cause any visible changes?

A few types of HPV can produce warts on the vagina, neck of womb or the anus. This is a slightly different situation. These can be treated by your local sexual health clinic. Your partner would also need examination and possible treatment. A cream or freezing of warts may be recommended.

Vaccine

There is now a vaccine available against HPV. It is being introduced to girls between 12-18 years old. Girls between 12-13 years old are now routinely being offered this vaccine and girls between 13-18 years are part of a 'catch up' programme to get vaccinated. There is currently no vaccine recommended for boys.

How can I get rid of the HPV?

Antibiotics do not work against viruses. Not smoking and having a healthy diet will boost your immune system and can help clear this virus. Women who have been treated for pre cancerous cells on their womb in the past may still carry HPV.

Further information

If you have any queries which have not been addressed in this leaflet, please contact the colposcopy clinic directly on 01234 792007 or Lesley Gillon, colposcopy nurse via the main hospital switchboard 01234 355122 on ext. 4426 or bleep 500. You may also like to visit: www.bsccp.org.uk