

# What Women with a Positive HPV Test Result Should Know

- Genital human papillomavirus (HPV) is a very common virus in men and women. It is passed on through genital contact, most often during vaginal and anal sex.
- Most sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives, though most will never know it because HPV usually has no signs or symptoms.
- There are about 40 types of genital HPV. In most cases, HPV goes away on its own, without causing any health problems. It is thought that the immune system fights off HPV infection naturally.
- But sometimes, HPV does not go away on its own. Some HPV types can cause genital warts. Other HPV types (called “high-risk” types) can cause cell changes on a woman’s cervix that can lead to cervical cancer over time. The types of HPV that cause genital warts are different from the types that can cause cancer.
- You have already taken the first step to prevent cervical cancer by getting screened with the Pap test. The Pap test can find cell changes (caused by HPV) on your cervix.
- You have also received a new test, called the HPV test. This test may also be called a high-risk HPV test. It can find the types of HPV that may be linked to cervical cancer. Your health professional may use this test to help decide how soon you should get your next Pap test and what (if any) other tests you may need.
- A positive HPV test means that you have HPV on your cervix. This does not mean that you have or will get cervical cancer. But it could mean that you have a higher chance of developing cell changes, which could lead to cervical cancer over time. Be sure to come back for all appointments and tests that your doctor recommends.
- Having HPV is not the same thing as having HIV or herpes.
- Having HPV also does not make it harder to get or stay pregnant.
- Doctors can treat the cell changes that HPV may cause; they do not treat HPV (a virus).

If you have questions about your test results, please write them down and ask about them during your next doctor’s visit. You can also call one of the organizations on the back of this card.

## What women with a high-risk HPV type should know for herself and her partner(s)

You and your partner(s) may benefit from talking openly about your sexual health and HPV.

### You and your partner should know that:

- HPV is very common in men and women. Most sexually active people will get HPV at some time in their lives. Even people with only one lifetime sex partner can get HPV, if their partner has been infected with HPV.
- The type of HPV found on your HPV test may cause cervical cancer; it does *not* cause genital warts.
- Partners who have been together for a while tend to share HPV. This means that your partner likely has HPV already, even though your partner may have no signs or symptoms.
- Having HPV does not mean that you or your partner is having sex outside of your relationship.
- There is no sure way to know when you got HPV or who gave it to you. A person can have HPV for many years before it is detected.
- There is currently no test to find out if they have HPV. But the most common health problem caused by HPV in men is genital warts. And the type of HPV found on your HPV test does not cause genital warts.
- Condoms may lower your chances of passing HPV to future partners, if used all the time and the right way. Condoms may also lower your chances of getting other types of HPV or developing HPV-related diseases (genital warts and cervical cancer). But HPV can infect areas that are not covered by a condom—so condoms may not *fully* protect against HPV.

If your sex partner is female, you should talk to her about the link between HPV and cervical cancer, and encourage her to get regular cervical cancer screenings.

#### The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)

1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636); 1-888-232-6348 TTY

Operators can answer your questions in English or Spanish 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

#### The National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service (CIS)

1-800-4-CANCER (1-800-422-6237); 1-800-332-8615 TTY

Information specialists can answer your questions in English or Spanish from 9:00am to 4:30pm in your time zone.

