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## Guarding Against Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

### What is HPV?

HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI). There are over 150 types of HPV, with some strains causing warts and others responsible for multiple cancers, including cervical, anal, penile, vaginal, vulvar and oropharyngeal cancers. Over 75% of sexually active people will have at least one HPV infection in their lifetime. Most infections resolve on their own, but certain types can persist and lead to cancer.

### How is HPV Transmitted?

HPV is primarily spread by having vaginal, anal or oral sexual activity with someone who has the virus. It can also be spread through genital skin-to-skin contact.

It's important to note that HPV can be transmitted even when there are no visible symptoms.

### Symptoms of HPV

Most people with HPV do not experience symptoms and may unknowingly transmit the virus. When symptoms occur, they can include:

- **Genital warts:** Small, raised or flat growths around the genital or anal areas.
- **Precancerous lesions:** Detected through screening (e.g., Pap tests)

before progressing to cancer.

- **Cancers:** Often asymptomatic until advanced stages.

### Health Risks Associated with HPV

HPV is responsible for:

- Nearly all cases of cervical cancer
- Over 90% of anal cancers
- Over 60% of penile and vulvar cancers
- Over 75% of vulvar cancers
- Over 70% of oropharyngeal cancers

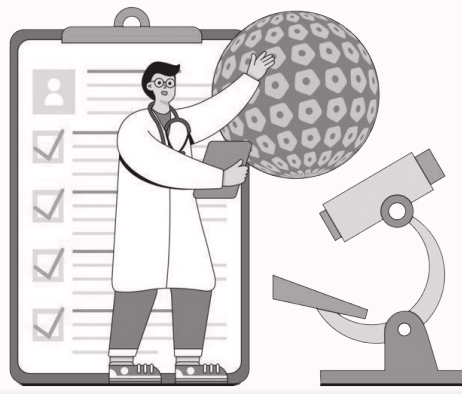
### Treatment

There is no cure for the virus itself. Treatments are available for some symptoms like genital warts and for managing pre-cancerous changes.

### Prevention

#### Vaccination

HPV vaccination is a highly effective way to prevent infections. The HPV vaccine (e.g., Gardasil 9) protects against nine types of HPV, including those most likely to cause cancer and genital warts. It is recommended for individuals over 9 years of age. Students can obtain the vaccine from their school's health centre, from their primary care provider or from a walk-in clinic.



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### *Safe Practices*

Use condoms or dental dams during sexual activity to reduce the risk of transmission. However, these methods do not provide complete protection against HPV since the virus can infect areas not covered by a barrier.

Regular screening: For those with a cervix, regular testing helps detect abnormal cell changes early.

### **Take Action**

1. Get vaccinated if you haven't already. Contact your campus health clinic or a local healthcare provider.
2. Practice safer sex to reduce the risk of HPV and other STIs.
3. Stay informed about regular screening recommendations.