

## HPV vaccination and cervical screening?

The vaccine does not protect against all HPV as it only targets the main HPV types. Also, if you have been exposed to the virus already, the vaccine may not protect you.

So it is important that all women, aged 25 to 60, continue to have regular cervical smear tests through the CervicalCheck programme. HPV testing has recently been adopted as part of CervicalCheck. This is expected to further enhance the performance of the screening programme by increasing test accuracy.

## What is CERVIVA?

CERVIVA is a multidisciplinary research group based in Ireland working on various different research topics in the area of HPV associated diseases. If you would like to learn more about our different research programmes please visit our website [www.cerviva.ie](http://www.cerviva.ie).

## Additional Information

The following websites have further information on HPV, cancer and cervical screening. If you are concerned about your health, please contact your GP

[www.cerviva.ie](http://www.cerviva.ie)

[www.cervicalcheck.ie](http://www.cervicalcheck.ie)

[www.cancer.ie](http://www.cancer.ie)

[www.hpv.ie](http://www.hpv.ie)

[www.mariekeating.ie/cervical-cancer](http://www.mariekeating.ie/cervical-cancer)

[www.jostrust.org.uk](http://www.jostrust.org.uk)

## CERVIVA welcomes your feedback

Email: [info@cerviva.ie](mailto:info@cerviva.ie)

[www.cerviva.ie](http://www.cerviva.ie)

Follow us on Twitter: [@Cerviva](https://twitter.com/Cerviva)

# HPV

## The Facts Made Simple for Everyone



## What is HPV?

Human papillomaviruses (HPV) are a group of viruses that are extremely common. About 80% of people will have a HPV infection at some time in their lives. There are more than 150 different types of HPV, around 40 of which can affect the genital area. Like other viral infections most HPV infections clear up on their own, but some can be present for many years with no symptoms. If you smoke this can prevent the infection from clearing. When HPV does not go away, it can cause health problems like genital warts and cancer.

## How is HPV spread?

HPV is usually spread by skin-to-skin contact during sexual activity. If you have ever engaged in sexual activity, you were probably exposed to HPV. It may be impossible to know how long HPV has been present as it can have no symptoms.

## How does HPV cause cancer?

Some types of HPV can cause changes to develop in the cells of the cervix, which if left untreated could develop into cervical cancer. HPV can cause other cancers including cancer of the vulva, vagina, penis, or anus. HPV can also cause cancer in the back of the throat, including part of the tongue and tonsils (called oropharyngeal cancer).

Cancer often takes years, even decades, to develop after a person gets HPV. The types of HPV that can cause genital warts are not the same as the types of HPV that can cause cancers. There is no way to know which people who have HPV will develop cancer or other health problems.

## How can I prevent HPV infection?

You can do several things to lower your chances of getting HPV.

### 1 Get vaccinated

HPV vaccines are safe and effective. In Ireland, the HPV vaccine is recommended for use in young women to protect against cervical cancer and genital warts.

### 2 Go for your regular smear test

In Ireland, CervicalCheck (The National Cervical Screening Programme) offers free smear tests for all women aged 25 to 60 years. [www.cervicalcheck.ie](http://www.cervicalcheck.ie)

### 3 Stop smoking

Smoking increases your risk of getting a HPV infection and increases the risk of HPV infection persisting for long periods of time. Stopping smoking reduces your risk of HPV infection.

### 4 Use condoms

Condoms can lower your chances of getting HPV. But HPV can infect areas that are not covered by a condom - so condoms may not give full protection against getting HPV.

## What is HPV vaccination?

HPV vaccines work in the same way as other vaccines. The body reacts by making special proteins, called antibodies, which help the immune system fight and clear the HPV infection so it can't cause cancer.

The vaccine works best for girls who have not been exposed to the virus through sexual activity although HPV vaccine can also be given to older girls and women up to 26 years of age.

In Ireland, the HPV vaccine, Gardasil®, is offered free of charge to all girls in their 1st year of second-level schools. Vaccination is implemented through a school-based programme to ensure high uptake. The vaccine can also be given to boys and in some countries is given to both genders to further reduce the risk of cancer.

The vaccine may also protect against other HPV-associated cancers including oropharyngeal cancers but more research is needed to determine this.

## Is the vaccine safe?

The vaccine is considered safe and well tolerated. In March 2015 the US CDC reported that 'HPV vaccines are safe and effective vaccines' ([www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/Vaccines/HPV/Index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccinesafety/Vaccines/HPV/Index.html)) In November 2015 the European Medicines Agency (EMA) reported on a review of HPV vaccines. This report found no evidence the vaccine was linked to chronic fatigue like conditions.

