**What is Human papillomavirus?**

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection. Nearly all sexually active people get HPV at some point in their lives.

**How is HPV transmitted?**

HPV is spread by skin-to-skin contact with an HPV-infected area. The HPV virus sometimes lives in the skin without causing symptoms. People of all genders can get HPV from vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has the virus; you can get infected even when your partner has no symptoms. You can develop symptoms years after you have sex with someone who is infected, making it difficult to know when you first became infected.

**What are the symptoms of HPV?**

In most cases, HPV goes away on its own and does not cause any symptoms. When HPV does not go away, it can cause health problems like genital warts and cancer.

Genital warts usually appear as a small bump or group of bumps in the genital area. They can be small or large, raised, flat, or cauliflower-shaped. Condoms don’t always protect against the virus because warts can grow on areas of the genitals not covered by a latex barrier.

The types of HPV that can cause genital warts are not the same as the types of HPV that can cause cancers.

**How can I avoid HPV and the health problems it can cause?**

- **Get vaccinated.** HPV vaccines protect against disease (including cancers).
- **Get screened for cervical cancer.** Routine screening for women ages 21 to 65 can prevent cervical cancer.

**What is the HPV vaccine?**

There are two brands of HPV vaccine: Gardasil and Cervarix. Cervarix protects against HPV strains 16 and 18, which cause 70% of cervical cancers. Gardasil is 99% effective in preventing HPV strains 16 and 18, and also strains 6 and 11 which cause 90% of genital wart cases.

Both of these vaccines are given in three doses over a span of 6 months. It is important to receive all three doses.

**Who should get vaccinated?**

- Heterosexual males through age 21
- Females through age 26
- Gay and bisexual men through age 26
- People with compromised immune systems (including individuals living with HIV/AIDS) through age 26, if they were not fully vaccinated when they were younger.

Adapted from:
- www.cdc.gov/STD/HPV/STDFact-HPV.htm
- www.nccconline.org/index.php/overview