

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

What You Can Do To Prevent Cancer Caused by HPV

Know Your Risk for Getting HPV

A risk factor is anything that raises your chance of getting a disease, such as cancer. Almost everyone who is sexually active and not vaccinated for HPV (human papillomavirus) will get the virus. You can get HPV from skin-to-skin (sexual) contact, such as vaginal sex, anal sex, or oral (mouth) sex. You can get it from someone who has the virus, even if they do not have symptoms.

Other factors can put you at a higher risk. If you were assigned female at birth (your gender now does not matter) and you smoke cigarettes, you're at higher risk. You're also at higher risk if you have had:

- A sexually transmitted infection (STI), including warts on your vagina, anus, or penis.
- Cervical, vaginal or vulvar cancer.
- HIV.
- An autoimmune disorder, such as lupus or sarcoidosis.
- A solid organ transplant.

Know Your Risk for Getting Cancer Caused by HPV

Having HPV raises your risk of getting a cancer caused by HPV. The types of HPV that cause cancer fall into 2 groups, low-risk and high-risk.

- Low-risk HPV can cause genital warts, but it usually does not lead to serious health problems.
- High-risk HPV can lead to cancer, even years after infection.

People of all genders can get HPV and HPV-related cancers.

6 Types of Cancer Caused by HPV

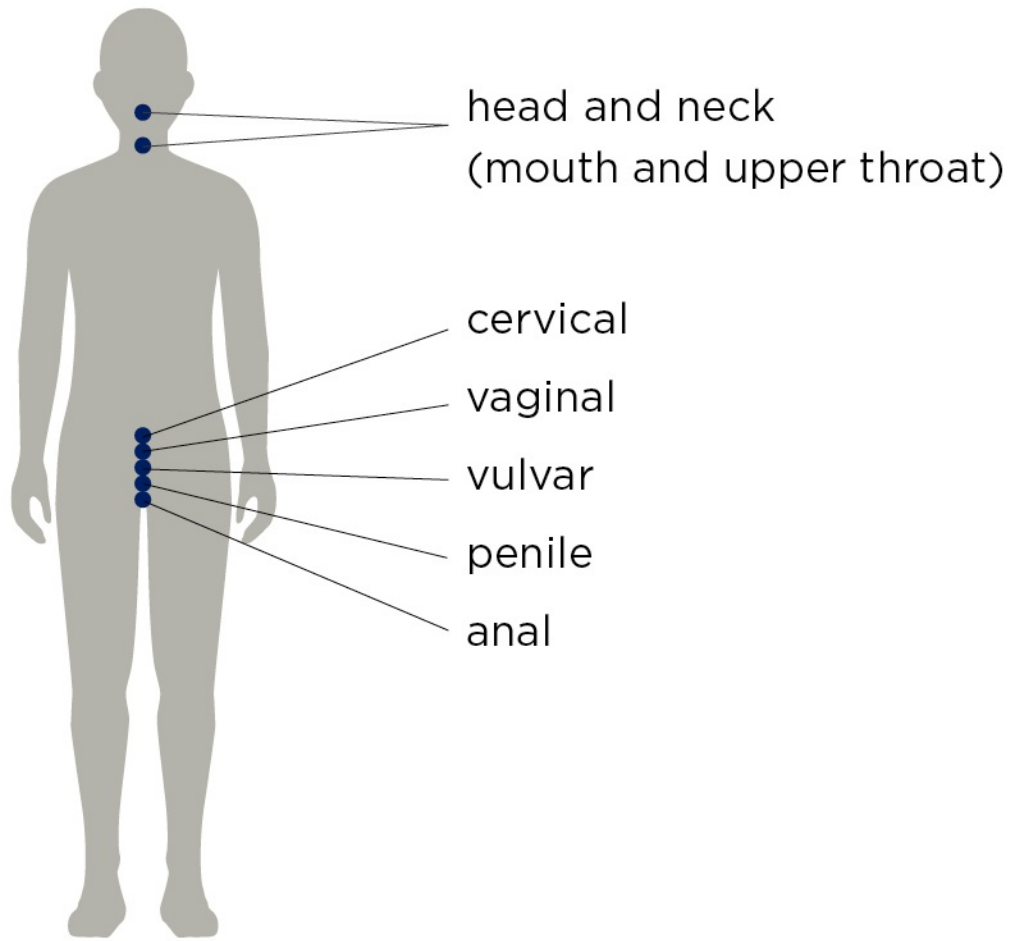


Figure 1. 6 types of cancer caused by HPV

What You Can Do To Lower Your Risk for HPV and HPV-Related Cancers

Get Vaccinated

The HPV vaccine is a shot in the arm that your healthcare provider gives you. The vaccine can protect you from the 9 most common types of HPV.

- Everyone ages 9 to 45 can get the vaccine.
- It's best to get the vaccine between ages 9 and 12. But it will still protect you if you get it when you're older.
- For people ages 15 and older, the vaccine is given in 3 shots. After the first shot, it's given again after 1 month and after 6 months.
- Getting the HPV vaccine does not make it harder to get pregnant in the future.

Even if you tested positive for HPV in the past, you still should get vaccinated.

Use Condoms and Dental Dams During Sexual Activity

During anal, vaginal, and oral (mouth) sex, use condoms and dental dams (a thin sheet that protects against mouth-to-skin contact). They can lower your risk of getting HPV, but don't prevent it. Getting the vaccine is the best way to prevent HPV.

Get Tested

Cervical Pap smears, anal Pap smears, and HPV tests can find HPV early.

- **Cervical Pap smears** look for cell changes that can become cancer if they are not treated. The cervix is the lower, narrow opening of the uterus. It leads from the uterus to the vagina. If you were assigned female at birth (your gender now does not matter), you probably have a cervix. For cervical cancer screening recommendations, visit [mskcc.org/cervical_cancer_screening](https://www.mskcc.org/cervical_cancer_screening)
- **Anal Pap smears** look for cell changes that can become cancer if they are not treated. The anus is the opening where stool (poop) comes out. These cell changes on your anus are sometimes called [anal dysplasia](#).
- **HPV tests** look for high-risk types of HPV in the cells in the cervix.

If you have abnormal Pap smear results or a positive HPV test result, you may need more tests or treatment. A positive HPV test result means the test found HPV. Talk with your healthcare provider about your risk for HPV and which tests are right for you.

HPV causes 9 out of 10 cervical and anal cancers.

Will My Health Insurance Cover the HPV Vaccine?

Most health plans cover the cost of the HPV vaccine. Ask your insurance company if yours does. If your health insurance does not cover the vaccine and you're younger than 18, you can get it for free. It's offered through the [Vaccines for Children](#) (VFC) program. If you're over 18, talk to your healthcare provider about how to get the vaccine for free.

Actions You Can Take Today

- Know your risk for HPV and cancers caused by HPV.
- Get the HPV vaccine. Call MSK at 844-241-2136 to schedule your vaccine appointment.
- Use condoms and dental dams during sex.
- Ask your healthcare provider about getting tested for HPV.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

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