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Genital Warts and Cancer

Cervical cancer, the most serious problem associated with genital HPV, is easily prevented through regular Pap smears and treatment of precancerous (dysplastic) cell changes. Informing yourself about HPV will help you to understand and manage the infection. You are not alone. It is estimated that tens of millions of Americans have HPV infection. For most, it is a minor problem.

The types of HPV linked to cervical cancer usually are not the types that cause genital warts. But a woman with genital warts, like any other sexually active woman, should get yearly Pap smears. Some types of HPV that cause "clinically inapparent" or "subclinical" infection are being studied as "risk factors" for cervical cancer. This means that certain HPV types, along with other factors, may make someone more likely to develop cancer. These other factors may include first intercourse at an early age, smoking, and the presence of other STDs.

Yearly Pap smears are the best safeguard against cervical cancer. Pap smears detect abnormal cells present on the surface of the cervix. Cancer usually can be prevented through the early detection and treatment of abnormal cervical tissue. Rarely, HPV causes mild types of cancer on the shaft of the penis called bowenoid papulosis and verrucous carcinoma. These can be easily treated. Anal cancer in homosexual men with AIDs may be caused by HPV also.