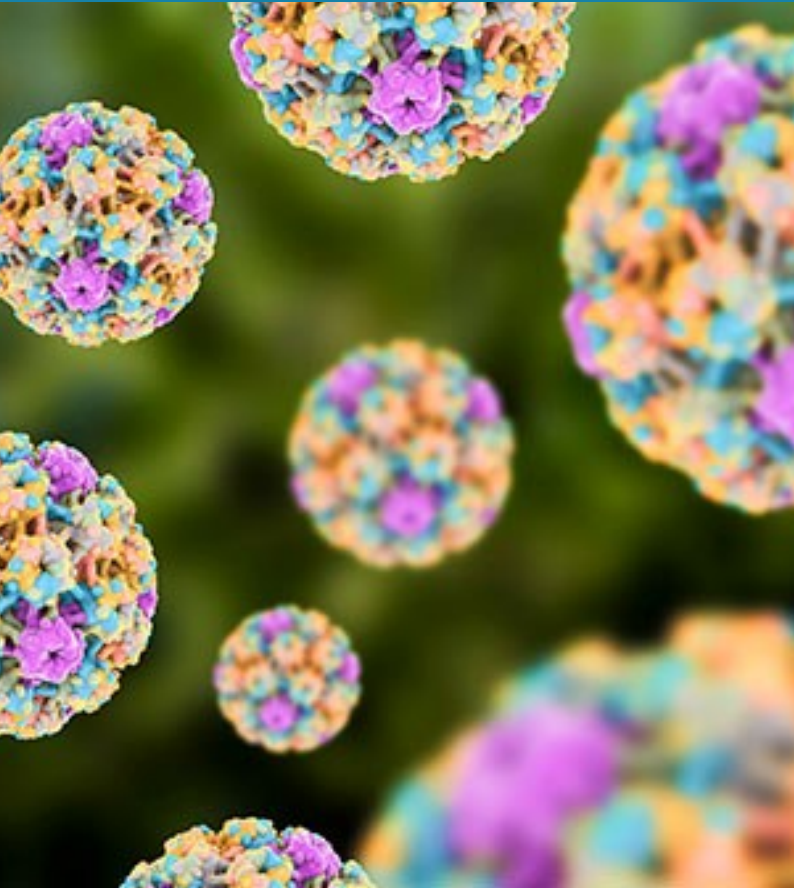


# FACTSHEET: Cervical Screening (Cancer Prevention) and HPV.



## Does the HPV virus cause cancer?

More than 99% of cancer of the cervix is due to high risk or oncogenic HPV. There are about 14 high risk (or oncogenic) types of HPV. This means they can be associated with cancer of the cervix. Oncogenic HPV types 16 and 18 cause about 75 % of cancer.

If high risk (oncogenic) HPV causes a persistent infection of the cervix, cell changes such as CIN3 (cervical intraepithelial neoplasia) and even possibly cancer can occur. These changes usually occur slowly over many years.

Persistent infection with high risk HPV can also be associated with other cancers such as vulvar, vagina, cervix, anus, penis, mouth and throat cancers.

## What is HPV & how do you catch it?

HPV is an abbreviation for human papilloma virus. HPV is a common virus which is shared between sexual partners. It usually goes away by itself but in rare cases it goes on to cause serious problems such as cervical or anal cancer. There is now a vaccine available which can protect a person from several types of HPV.

There are over 100 types of human papillomavirus (HPV) and around 40 can infect the genital region via sexual contact. HPV infection is very common, 80 % of men and women who have ever been sexually active have been exposed to HPV.

You can get HPV by having direct genital skin contact with an infected person. Sexually transmitted HPV can occur with vaginal, oral, anal sex or genital to genital skin contact without penetrative sex.

Genital HPV infection is often transient, causes no symptoms and resolves spontaneously. Some types of HPV may cause simple warts which are small lumps on the skin. Genital warts are usually caused by low risk HPV types most commonly HPV types 6 and 11.

# What is the Cervical Screening Program & how does it prevent cancer?

- The Pap test has been replaced by a Cervical Screening Test (CST) in Australia in 2017.
- The CST looks for the presence of HPV. This new CST is an improved, more sensitive test than the previous Pap test.

The CST is an HPV test and if HPV positive, the sample is checked automatically for cell changes. This test is only available for women.

There is no HPV test for males although there is some research ongoing to look at how anal cancer can be prevented in men who have sex with men.

HPV testing is not included in a screen for sexually transmitted infections.

- It is now only necessary to have the new CST every 5 years, which is safer and more protective than having a Pap test every 2 years.
- Women will be invited to have a screening test from the age of 25 and have their last screening test between 70 and 74 years of age.

The experience of having a Cervical Screening Test (CST) is the same as the Pap test. The test involves a pelvic examination with a speculum insertion in the vagina to view the cervix and a sample taken. This examination should not be painful or uncomfortable, and all our doctors and some nurses are experienced in conducting this examination and taking a CST.

There may be an option for self-collection for an HPV test for certain eligible women who are under screened or never screened within a clinic setting. Self-testing home collection tests are not recommended and are not part of the National Cervical Screening Program.

If you attend Clinic 66 for cervical screening, your test will be "bulk billed" to Medicare, ie no extra costs for pathology. For women who don't have Medicare cover, we can do cervical cancer screening for you too! There may be a small cost for the lab tests, but these are usually covered by health insurance. It is very easy to screen for infection, (such as chlamydia) at the same time a Cervical Screening Test is performed.

## What if my cervical screening test is positive?

If HPV is found on the screening test, further action will be taken. In the lab, the sample will be looked at closely, to see the actual cells which come from the cervix. This will tell us if the HPV has affected the cells, which may need treatment.

Abnormal CST results can be classified into low risk, intermediate risk or higher risk.

An abnormal CST may mean having a repeat test at a shorter interval, or it may be that a colposcopy is required to provide more information.

## Is it safe to wait until 25 for the 1st cervical screening test?

It is safe to have a first Cervical Screening Test at the age of 25 years because:

- Cervical cancer is very rare in young women.
- The cervical screening program has not been shown to make a difference to the detection of cervical cancers in this age group.
- We now know that HPV infection and cervical abnormalities are common in young sexually active women. These abnormalities in young women usually clear without treatment.
- Young women and men are now protected by the HPV vaccine, given while at school, which includes 2 types of HPV that potentially cause 75 % of cancer of the cervix.

However, you may be eligible to have a cervical screening test if you are younger than 25 years old and have:

- experienced first sexual activity before 14 years of age or,
- have an illness or are on medication affecting your immune system,
- symptoms which need to be investigated, such as intermenstrual bleeding.

## What is a Colposcopy?

If a woman has an abnormal test, and HPV and/or abnormal cells are detected, it may be necessary to take a closer look at her cervix to get more information. This might involve a colposcopy. Colposcopy involves a speculum insertion into the vagina like the CST examination and a high powered binocular microscope (colposcope) is used to examine the vulva, vagina or cervix in a woman.

Colposcopy may involve using acetic acid and iodine washes, and using coloured filters to properly examine the tissues under high powered magnification. It may be necessary to take a biopsy, in order to provide information about abnormal looking cells. For instance, if HPV has been found and abnormal cells indicate pre-cancerous or cancerous change, then a biopsy taken at colposcopy will help the gynaecologist decide what, if any treatment is required.

Colposcopy can be performed on pregnant women and women who have an IUD. Tell your gynaecologist if you think you might be pregnant, or if you have an IUD.

By screening and closely observing and/or treating, the transition of abnormal cells to cancer cells, is stopped, and cancer does not develop.

# Does HPV vaccination help to prevent cancer?

In 2007, Australia led the world with a National HPV Vaccination Programme aimed to prevent infection with Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). It aims to reduce HPV infection and the number of abnormal cervical screening tests as well as genital warts.

However, all women still need to have cervical cancer screening, even if they have had the HPV vaccination, because the vaccine doesn't provide protection against **all** types of HPV that can potentially cause cancer.

In 2018, a new HPV vaccine was introduced in Australia. It is capable of vaccinating against 9 types of HPV and aims to reduce the incidence of cancer of the cervix by 93%.

This new HPV vaccine protecting against 9 types of HPV, is now used in the school-based HPV immunisation programme for boys and girls. It is also available to other men and women.



## Who needs the HPV vaccination & why?

Anyone who has sexual contact can get infected with HPV. Sexually transmitted HPV can occur with vaginal, oral, anal sex or genital to genital skin contact without penetrative sex. Often people get it soon after having sex for the first time.

The more sexual partners a person has, the more chance they have of being infected with a number of different types of HPV. However, people who have only had one partner, people who haven't had sex for a long time, and people who use condoms can still be infected with HPV.

There are usually no symptoms from the HPV infection. Sometimes people may develop warty skin lesions if they have contracted subtypes 6 or 11, but most people can be infected with HPV and never know it.



HPV vaccination can protect an individual from being infected with some of the most common types of HPV that can potentially cause genital warts and cancer.

The HPV vaccine is best given to young males and females before they become sexually active. In Australia, the HPV vaccination is available free to all girls and boys of 12-13 years of age and young people up to 19 years old who missed the school-based HPV vaccination.

There are also potential benefits from vaccinating people who have already become sexually active, as they may not yet have been exposed to all types of HPV and maybe at risk of future exposure to HPV.

HPV vaccination does not however, provide any protection or treatment against the subtype of HPV used in the vaccine if the person has already been infected with it.

For those not eligible for the free HPV vaccine, the cost of the course of 3 doses of HPV vaccine is about \$450.

The HPV vaccine is an effective way to help prevent cancer! We recommend vaccination.

The HPV vaccine is safe and effective with very few contraindications. Here at Clinic 66, we can provide HPV vaccination to you and will provide a prescription to be collected at a local pharmacy. We can vaccinate men and woman who want to be protected against HPV infection.