

*Take the Time...*

*Good Health Is For Life*

**Regular Pap tests  
can save your life**

## **Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) and Cancer of The Cervix My Pap Test Result Says I Have HPV - What Does It Mean To Me?**

### **What Is HPV or Human Papilloma Virus?**

- n HPV is a family of viruses that can cause warts in people
- n HPV is found in and around the genital organs of men and women like the penis, vagina, anus etc.
- n HPV can pass between two people mostly through skin-to-skin sexual contact

### **How do I know I have HPV?**

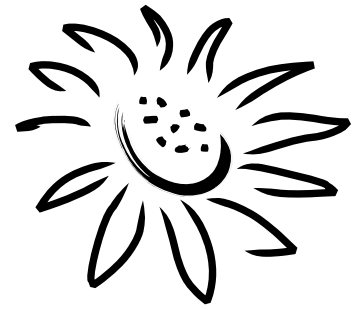
- n usually there are no symptoms
- n most often the first time you know you have been exposed to HPV is through a Pap test result
- n unless a person has a visible wart in or around the genital area HPV can go unnoticed and can be passed on to partner(s)
- n very rarely do women and men develop genital warts that can be seen and/or felt

### **How did I get HPV?**

- n HPV is very common
- n research estimates that 60-80% of people who have had sex have been exposed to HPV at some time
- n the virus can pass between two people mostly through skin-to-skin sexual contact
- n condoms offer some protection, but HPV may be present on skin that is not covered
- n HPV is rarely passed to a partner through oral sex

### **What is the link between HPV and Cancer of the Cervix?**

- n most women who have been exposed to HPV and who have warts do not develop cancer of the cervix
- n exposure to HPV through sexual contact at a young age seems to increase the risk of cancer of the cervix
- n strong body defenses (immune system) can fight off most viruses including HPV
- n some women who have a weakened immune system are at greater risk for developing cancer of the cervix from HPV
- n a few HPV virus types found on the cervix can slowly lead to cancer if they are not found and treated



## Are there treatments?

- n your own body's defenses (immune system) will often fight off the HPV virus and warts
- n if your body cannot get rid of the warts, there are many different treatments
- n talk to your doctor or nurse about your treatment options

## How do I reduce the risk of HPV?

- n If you are sexually active, it is hard to prevent exposure to HPV
- n Choose not to have sex
- n Delay having sex until late teens
- n Limit your number of sexual partners - you may have a greater chance of getting cancer of the cervix if you have had many different sexual partners or if your partner has had many partners
- n Protect yourself from other sexually transmitted infections like chlamydia and gonorrhea by using condoms
- n It is important to take care of yourself by eating well (follow Canada's Food Guide), exercising regularly, managing stress and getting enough rest
- n Avoid tobacco smoke. Smoking and second hand smoke may cause a mild HPV to become cancer of the cervix

## Coping with HPV

- n HPV is very common and you can have HPV for many years without signs or symptoms
- n finding out that you have HPV is upsetting and often comes as a shock to many people
- n the HPV virus can stay hidden in your system without producing warts for months or years
- n tell your partner that you have HPV; he or she may need treatment
- n most importantly, remember to follow through on your treatment plan

## A Regular Pap Test Can Find HPV and Help Prevent Cancer of the Cervix

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