

### **What is HPV?**

Finding out you have HPV can be disturbing. You may be concerned that your partner was unfaithful. Your partner may think that you were. It's really important to make sure you both have the facts about HPV:

- Most adults have HPV at some time during their lives.
- HPV doesn't cause symptoms and usually goes away on its own.
- Most people with HPV don't know they have it.
- Usually it is impossible to know which partner gave the person HPV.
- HPV is not a sign that you or your partner was unfaithful.
- It is not helpful or fair to blame your partner if you have HPV.

Having an open conversation with your partner about HPV is important, so you are both informed and can both make safe decisions about your health.

### Making Sense of HPV

#### **Is HPV a serious infection?**

There are many types of HPV. The types that can lead to cervical cancer are called high risk types. Other types (low risk) may cause genital warts, but not cervical cancer. High risk HPV is a problem only when it doesn't go away. If it stays in your body for a long time it can lead to cervical cancer.

#### **Are there symptoms of HPV?**

No, HPV infection doesn't cause symptoms so most people don't know they have it. A person can have HPV for a very long time before it can be found.

#### **How does a person get HPV?**

HPV is spread from one person to another by skin-to-skin contact to the genital area. HPV can be spread if there is no intercourse.

HPV can be spread by vaginal, anal and possibly oral sex.

#### **Are there any ways to avoid getting HPV?**

Two things can reduce your risk for getting HPV. 1) Limit your sexual partners. Have sex with just one person, who only has sex with you. 2) Use condoms: Condoms do not fully protect from HPV, but they can lower the chance you'll get it. Condoms also help prevent HIV, herpes and other sexually transmitted infections

## Making Sense of Cervical Cancer Screening

### **What screening tests are done for cervical cancer?**

There are two main kinds of screening tests:

- The PAP test
- The HPV test

What is a PAP test? The Pap test is used to look for abnormal cervical cells. Pap tests are often done during the pelvic exam portion of the well-woman visit. During a Pap test, your health care provider will collect a sample of cervical cells for analysis by a laboratory. About 90% of Pap test results are normal. If the test result is abnormal, you may need more tests. In most cases an abnormal Pap result does not mean that a woman has cancer.

### **What is the HPV test?**

The HPV test is a very accurate way to tell if high-risk HPV is present in any woman's cervix. This test can use the same sample of cells taken for the Pap test or a separate sample taken right after the Pap. A positive test result means a woman has a high risk HPV. She should be followed closely to make sure the infection goes away and that she does not develop abnormal cells. A positive HPV test result does not mean that a woman has cancer. Also, a positive HPV test result is not a sign that you or your partner had sex outside the relationship. A person can have HPV for a long time before it's found.

### **When would an HPV test be done?**

The HPV test is used in two ways: To see if a woman with borderline Pap test results (one that shows unusual cells but not dysplasia) needs additional testing. To screen for cervical cancer, along with the Pap test, in women aged 30 or older who have HPV are more likely to have had it a long time. That means they have a greater risk of developing cervical cancer. Women in their 20s don't need an HPV test in addition to the Pap test. HPV infection is very common in this age group and usually goes away.

**When should a woman be screened for cervical cancer?** Experts recommend that a woman's first Pap test be done by age 21 or three years after she becomes sexually active with vaginal intercourse-whichever is first. Women under age 30 should speak to their health care provider about how often to have a Pap test. Women age 30 or older can have an HPV test along with the Pap test. Women who have a normal Pap test result and a negative HPV test result should have both tests repeated in three years. Women age 70 or older should discuss with their health care provider whether or not to continue cervical cancer screening. Women who have had a total hysterectomy (surgery to remove the uterus and cervix) that was not performed to treat cancer or dysplasia don't need to be screened.

### **Stay Healthy**

All women should have a regular visit with a reproductive health care provider to stay healthy. This "well-woman" visit is a chance to talk to your health care provider about:

Problems with your menstrual cycle, birth control, sexuality, infertility, menopause,

sensitive topics, such as depression or a harmful relationship. The well woman visits is different for each woman, because every woman's needs are different. During the well-woman visit, your health care provider: can answer your questions and address any concerns you have, Will do a breast exam and check for some common diseases, such as high blood pressure. Might perform a pelvic exam, which may include cervical cancer screening. (Not all women need a screening every year. Your health care provider can tell you how often you should be screened).

### **What is cervical cancer?**

The cervix is the lower part of your uterus (womb). Cancer of the cervix is a serious but preventable disease. Screening tests can find changes in cervical cells before cancer develops. Changes in cervical cells are called dysplasia. Removing cells that have dysplasia can prevent cervical cancer. If left untreated, dysplasia can lead to cervical cancer. Screening tests can help prevent cervical cancer. Cervical cancer can be cured if its found at an early stage.

### **What causes cervical cancer?**

Cervical cancer is caused by a virus called human papillomavirus (HPV). HPV is not the same as human immunodeficiency virus (HIV, which causes AIDS) or herpes simplex virus (HSV, which causes cold sores and genital herpes). Infection with HPV is very common among adults in the U.S. In fact most people will have HPV at some point in their lives. Usually your body's immune system fights off the infection, and HPV goes away on its own.