

# Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

This leaflet has been written by staff working in the Colposcopy Clinic at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital.

We hope you find it useful. If, after you have read it, you have any questions or concerns, please contact the Colposcopy Clinic on 020 3315 5927 during the following hours:

- Mon–Thu: 8:30am–4:30pm
- Fri: 8:30am–12:30pm

Colposcopy Clinic  
Chelsea and Westminster Hospital  
369 Fulham Road  
London  
SW10 9NH

T: 020 3315 5927

Notes

## Membership and Patient Advice & Liaison Service (M-PALS)

If you require information, support or advice about our services, you can contact the M-PALS office on the ground floor of the hospital just behind the main reception.

Alternatively, you can feedback your comments/suggestions on one of our comment cards, available at the M-PALS office, or on a feedback form on our website [www.chelwest.nhs.uk](http://www.chelwest.nhs.uk).

We value your opinion and invite you to provide us with feedback of the service you received via the Patient Experience Tracker (PET). Please ask your nurse for more information.

T: 020 3315 6727  
E: [m-pals@chelwest.nhs.uk](mailto:m-pals@chelwest.nhs.uk)



## Chelsea and Westminster Hospital

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# Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

Information for patients

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## What is HPV?

Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) is a very common infection that is passed by sexual contact.

It is likely that most of us who have ever been sexually active have had HPV at some times in our lives, although we may not have known.

It is important to note that its presence has also been demonstrated in women who have never been sexually active.

HPV is not a single virus but a family of more than 100 types of HPV that affect the body. Approximately 40 types of HPV affect the genital tract area.

It is some of these types that can cause cell changes to cells on the cervix that can lead to cervical cancer. Most HPV infections however go away on their own.

A couple of strains of HPV cause genital warts that you can see, but otherwise you cannot see HPV.

## How is the virus spread?

Genital HPV is passed on during sexual contact including vaginal and anal sex, oral sex and non-penetrative sex.

## How is HPV diagnosed?

If you have an abnormal smear test result it is a sign that you have probably been exposed to HPV.

Presently the NHS does not test for HPV, however the examination/tests that are done in the Colposcopy Clinic can indicate if signs of the infection are present.

## Is there any treatment?

There is no reliable treatment to get rid of the virus but since in most women it disappears spontaneously over time, a "wait and see" policy is the usual management, depending on what your cervical smear result suggests.

## Should we practise safe sex or use barrier methods of contraception?

Correct and consistent use of male or female condoms would appear to be a sensible precaution. However, the virus might have been present for many years before its detection and thereby passed on before condoms were used and so it is difficult to give specific advice about this.

Furthermore, even with condom use there are still areas of unprotected skin. Most people acquire the virus and never show its presence, developing a kind of immunity.

Others harbour it for short or long periods of time without its presence being detected. For some it can cause cell changes on the cervix.

The presence of HPV should not affect your chances of becoming pregnant.

## How long might I have had the infection?

This is an impossible question to answer since the virus can remain in your body without harm for considerable periods of time or be quickly dealt with by your immune system.

## Does smoking have an effect on the HPV?

Smoking has a significant impact on the body's natural immune system—therefore you are less likely to get rid of the virus and at a higher risk of developing precancerous changes which may progress into cervical cancer over a period of time.

## How will it affect my health?

Fortunately most HPV infections go away on their own within six months to two years without causing any complications or harmful long-term effects. Often the psychological and emotional impact of being told you have HPV is the most worrying.

In the Colposcopy Clinic we will monitor any changes to your cervix that HPV is causing and we will treat any abnormal cell change that is necessary.

If you have any questions regarding this topic or any other issues, you can speak to one of the nursing staff in clinic and/or contact the Clinical Nurse Specialists in Colposcopy on 020 3315 5927.

## Questions from partners

### Should they see a doctor or attend a sexual health clinic?

If your partner is worried about you having HPV found in screening, they may wish to visit their GP or a sexual health clinic for a further explanation and/or examination.

### Can your partner be tested for HPV?

At present there is no reliable test available to demonstrate the presence of the virus.

### Can your partner be treated?

This is unnecessary unless the virus develops into clinical warts (growths) which project above the surrounding skin.

### How long might your partner have had the infection?

Again this is an impossible question to answer since the virus can remain in your body without harm for considerable periods of time or be dealt with quickly by the immune system.

## Further information

- Visit [www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/cervical](http://www.cancerscreening.nhs.uk/cervical)

## Sexual health appointments

**T:** 020 3315 6699

**W:** [www.chelwest.nhs.uk/hiv-sexual-health](http://www.chelwest.nhs.uk/hiv-sexual-health)