

Cervical Cancer and HPV



KNOWING THE FACTS IS YOUR KEY TO PREVENTING CERVICAL CANCER.

WHAT IS HPV?

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) or 'Wart Virus' as it is sometimes called, is quite common. It causes skin warts but may infect other parts of the body. There are many different types of HPV (over 200) and some of these may be transmitted sexually and produce lesions on the cervix of the uterus. The changes produced by HPV infection of the cervix may be detected on a Pap Smear.

HPV infection is one of the most common sexually transmitted viral diseases. Most women with HPV infection do not have any symptoms. The first indication of the infection may be an abnormal Pap Smear result. The risk of getting an HPV infection increases with the number of sexual partners, but it is possible to contract the virus from one partner and be unaware of it for some years.

Providing services since 1936, Healthscope Pathology operates throughout Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Malaysia.

Healthscope Pathology has purpose built, state-of-the-art service and molecular research laboratories which ensure the highest standard of testing.

IS HPV INFECTION SERIOUS?

Most HPV infections are not serious and do not produce any symptoms. The body's immune system tends to clear most infections in one to two years. However in a small percentage of cases, the HPV infection may produce changes to cervical cells which may lead to cervical cancer. There are 14 high-risk types of HPV virus associated with cervical cancer. A woman who has a persistent infection with one of the high-risk HPV viruses has an increased risk of developing cervical cancer.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 'HIGH' AND 'LOW' RISK HPV TYPES?

High-risk HPV viruses can cause abnormal (dysplastic) changes to cervical cells which can develop into cervical cancer. On the other hand there are a number of HPV types that are classified as 'low-risk', as these viruses are not known to pose a threat for developing cervical cancer.

Such HPV types can cause mild cell changes in the cervix, but the changes are generally harmless. Many genital warts are caused by low-risk HPV viruses.

CAN THE PAP SMEAR DETECT HIGH-RISK HPV VIRUSES?

No. The Pap Smear only detects abnormal cell changes. These cell changes may be produced by a variety of factors including from infection with both low and high-risk type HPV viruses.

IS THERE A TEST FOR HIGH-RISK HPV VIRUSES?

Healthscope Pathology now offers a sensitive molecular biology based test that will detect individual high-risk HPV viruses. It is called the HPV-PCR test.

WHO SHOULD HAVE THE HPV TEST?

If you are worried about infection with a high-risk HPV virus, you should ask your doctor if this test is appropriate for you.

WHAT ABOUT TESTS FOR MALE PARTNERS?

There is currently no approved test available to detect HPV infection in men. Although the infection is common in men, most do not show any symptoms, making diagnosis difficult. Infection due to some of the low-risk HPV viruses can cause benign genital warts in both men and women. There is also increasing evidence that the high-risk HPV types are associated with other less common cancers in both men and women.

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact our Customer Service Centre.

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