



HPV

THE NEW ZEALAND HPV PROJECT

HPV and Throat Cancer

Common Questions
and Answers

A brochure for patients with
HPV-positive throat cancer
and their families



What is HPV?

- HPV is a sexually transmitted infection that can infect the oropharynx (tonsils and back of throat), genitals and anus.
- There are many types of HPV. HPV can cause cancer, warts, or have no effect.
- HPV is very common. 80% of us will acquire some type of genital or oral HPV infection.
- Some people, many years after acquiring oral HPV, may develop throat cancer as a result of the HPV infection. This is technically known as HPV-associated oropharyngeal squamous cell cancer (HPV-OSCC).

What causes throat cancer?

- Studies in the US show that HPV now causes most throat cancers.
- It is recommended that throat tumours be tested for HPV.
- Smoking and alcohol can also cause throat cancer.

How did I get an oral HPV infection?

- HPV is transmitted to your mouth by oral sex. It may also be possible to get oral HPV other ways.
- Increased number of oral sex partners increases chances of oral HPV infection.
- Having an oral HPV infection does not mean your partner was/is unfaithful or had a large number of sexual partners.
- Many people with throat HPV cancer have only had a few oral sex partners.

Who has oral HPV infection?

- Genital HPV is so common anyone who gives oral sex may be exposed to oral HPV during their life.
- In the US, around 10% of men and 3.6% of women have HPV in their mouths at any given time.
- Most people clear the infection on their own within a year, but in some people HPV infection persists.

Can I transmit oral HPV to others?

Family and friends

- Oral HPV is not casually transmitted by sharing drinks or kissing on cheeks.
- It isn't known yet if open-mouth kissing can transmit HPV.

Partners of people with throat cancer

- If one partner has HPV then the other partner is likely to have been exposed to the infection.

- You do not need to change your intimate sexual contact.
- Female partners should have regular cervical (PAP) screening.

New sexual partners in the future

- Many patients with HPV throat cancer have no HPV detectable in their mouth after treatment, while others do.
- With new partners, discuss protection methods (e.g. condoms, dental dams or barrier protection).

When did I get this infection?

- It is impossible to know the time from first oral HPV infection to cancer, but it takes many years. Therefore, it is not possible to know when and from whom the infection was acquired.
- HPV is common and the great majority of people who acquire it will clear the infection and never have any evidence of having had an infection.

What does having HPV in my tumour mean?

- Throat cancer patients with HPV in their tumour live longer, on average, than people without HPV (i.e. HPV-positive tumours usually respond well to therapy).
- However, patients who smoke tobacco or have smoked for a long time in the past do not live as long, on average, as patients who have never smoked. Current smokers are strongly encouraged to stop. Help is available.

Will the HPV vaccine help me?

- The HPV vaccine prevents people from getting new HPV infections for the strains it covers.
- The vaccine will not help clear an infection you already have.
- The HPV vaccine is recommended for people aged 9–26 years and is available free for girls and young women up to their 20th birthday, any persons with confirmed HIV infection, and transplant patients. Ask your GP or health provider for further information or to get the vaccine.

Will my partner also get throat cancer?

- The risk of HPV throat cancer may be slightly higher among partners of HPV throat cancer patients, but this cancer remains extremely rare among partners.
- There are no recommended screening tests for HPV throat cancer.

Where can I get further information?

- New Zealand HPV Project website www.hpv.org.nz
- New Zealand HPV Project Helpline Tollfree 0508 11 12 13
- Your GP, Family Planning Clinic or Sexual Health Clinic

New Zealand HPV Project

Sexually Transmitted Infection Education Foundation Ltd

Copies of this booklet are available from:
PO Box 2437, Auckland 1140, New Zealand

Email: info@hpv.org.nz

www.hpv.org.nz

Helpline Tollfree 0508 11 12 13

Phone: (09) 433 6526 Fax: (09) 360 2835



See our new website with information on all
sexually transmitted infections:

www.justthefacts.co.nz

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