

What is the Human Papillomavirus? (HPV)

Human Papillomavirus, HPV, is often called the wart virus. Most people have come across wart viruses in the form of warts and verrucas. However, there are now about 100 different types of Human Papillomavirus, and although they belong to the same family, they all behave differently. For example, the type that causes verrucas shows no interest in any other part of the body. There are other types of Human Papillomavirus, which cause visible genital warts but this virus is not associated with cervical cancer. Research has shown that certain types of HPV may be linked to abnormal changes in cervical cells, which can lead to cancer of the cervix (neck of the womb). Doctors are now interested in the role Human Papillomavirus testing may have in the early detection of this disease.

How do you get HPV?

Although there may be occasional exceptions, it is thought that Human Papillomavirus is sexually transmitted. It is estimated that approximately 70% of all women have this infection at some time in their life.

However, because it can lie dormant for years, and because it produces no symptoms, no-one can be sure how long it may have been present in the cervix. Not all women with Human Papillomavirus will have abnormal cells in the cervix.

Is there a treatment for HPV?

At present there is no recommended treatment for Human Papillomavirus infection. In the majority of cases the body's immune system will clear the infection as it would a common cold. In cases where the infection is persistent and not cleared naturally, more frequent monitoring for abnormal changes to the cervix may be required.

The future

Research is being undertaken in the Greater Manchester area to find out how best to manage this infection and whether HPV testing could improve the current cervical screening programme. There is also a great deal of work being done to produce a suitable vaccine.

FURTHER INFORMATION

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A Randomised Trial In Screening To

Improve Cytology

Human Papillomavirus

(HPV)

An Information Leaflet for Women

