

# HPV: *The Facts*

## What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a common virus that 8 in 10 of us will get at some time during our lives.

There are over 200 different types of HPV. Around 40 types affect the genital area:

- Most do not cause any problems.
- Some cause skin conditions like genital warts.
- About 13 types are linked to cancer – these types are called high-risk HPV.

## How do people get HPV?

HPV is usually passed on through skin-to-skin contact. For HPV that affects the genitals, this includes:

- oral, anal or vaginal sex
- touching in the genital area
- sharing sex toys.

You can get HPV the first time you have sex. In fact, anyone who has ever had any type of sexual contact can get HPV.

HPV does not have symptoms and there is no treatment, which can be worrying.

Try to remember it is common and, in 9 in 10 people, the immune system will fight and clear the HPV within 2 years.

Sometimes the immune system can't fight the HPV and it stays in the body. This is called a persistent infection.

## HPV and cervical cancer

Almost all cervical cancers (99.7%) are caused by high-risk HPV. High-risk HPV can cause the cells of the cervix to change. We call these cell changes (abnormal cells). Cell changes are not cancer but, if they progress, they may develop into cervical cancer.

As well as cervical cancer, high-risk HPV is linked to other cancers that affect men and women, including anal, vulval, vaginal, and some head and neck cancers.

## Ways to reduce your risk

You can't completely protect against HPV. But there are ways you can reduce your risk of getting HPV or developing a persistent infection that your immune system can't get rid of:

- Try to stop smoking. In the UK, smoking tobacco is linked to about 2 in 10 cervical cancers. Smoking weakens your immune system, making it less able to get rid of HPV. If you want to quit, the NHS has programmes to support you.
- Have the HPV vaccine. If you are eligible, the HPV vaccine protects against high-risk HPV types that are linked to 7 in 10 cervical cancers.

If you require any further information or have any questions please do not hesitate to contact the Colposcopy clinic on:

### **Doncaster Royal Infirmary:**

Gynaecology Outpatient Clinic: 01302 642808

### **Bassetlaw Hospital:**

Gynaecology Outpatient Clinic: 01909 572214.

### **Patient Advice & Liaison Service (PALS)**

The team are available to help with any concerns, complaints or questions you may have about your experience at the Trust. Their office is in the Main Foyer (Gate 4) of Doncaster Royal Infirmary. Contact can be made either in person, by telephone or email.

### **The contact details are:**

**Telephone:** 01302 642764 or 0800 028 8059

**Email:** [dbth.pals.dbh@nhs.net](mailto:dbth.pals.dbh@nhs.net)

Gynaecology Outpatient Clinic

