

AUSTRALIAN
Clinicallabs

HPV





What is HPV?

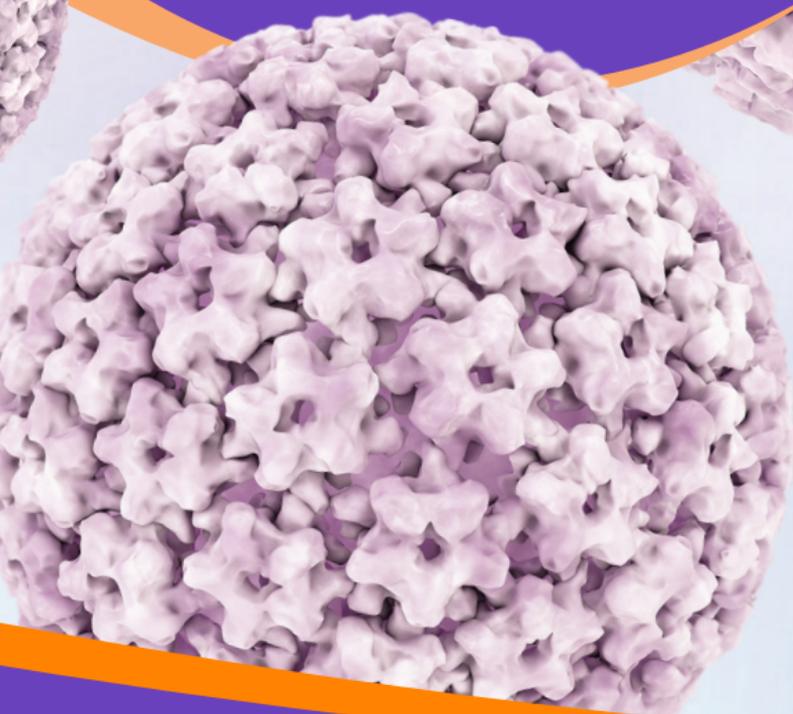
Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a common viral infection that can cause skin warts and affect the genital tract in both men and women.

HPV has been identified as one of the main causes for atypical changes in cervical cells from a Pap test. In a very small percentage of women, HPV infection can lead to precancer or cancer, making testing very important.

HPV types



There are many different types of HPV. Low risk types may cause genital warts and minor changes in the cervix. High risk types cause minor changes, and sometimes cause precancerous changes and cervical cancer.



Symptoms

HPV does not cause you to feel unwell or experience irritation, discharge or bleeding. In fact, most women with HPV changes don't ever develop warts and are unaware they have the infection.

HPV may be present for several years before it causes changes in the cervical cells that are identified in a routine Pap test. However, HPV can be detected through a simple test which identifies the presence of high risk types linked with cervical precancer and cancer.

Testing process for HPV

Two separate, negative HPV tests allow patients that were previously treated for high grade cervical pre-cancer to return to a normal two yearly Pap test rather than annual follow up.

In some women with abnormal Pap tests, HPV tests can assist in determining the necessity for further treatment. Primary screening for cervical cancer by using HPV testing has commenced in Australia.

The process of collecting cells for the HPV test is simple. Cells are scraped or brushed gently from the cervix with a broom-like device or brush/spatula combination and sent to the lab for analysis.

The information about your HPV result, combined with a Pap test result, enables your doctor to assess whether you require further investigation or normal ongoing Pap tests. If changes are present in your Pap test and you have a high risk HPV type, your doctor may suggest a colposcopy.

How do you get HPV?

HPV is an infection that can affect anyone who is, or has been, sexually active and is not uncommon. In most cases, HPV infection is temporary and harmless, causing no problem. However, persistent infection with a high risk HPV type can be linked to an increased risk of precancerous changes and cancer of the cervix

Treatment & retesting

If only minor changes show in your Pap test and a high risk HPV type is not evident, then you are at a low risk of progressing to a precancerous or cancerous change in your cervix. In this instance, your doctor may recommend a Pap test follow up protocol, rather than further treatment.

Any cervical lesions can almost always be easily treated. The lesions are generally quite small and may be removed either with surgical, diathermy or laser treatment.

Further information

Cervical cancer is a rare condition. Advances in cytology testing have led to the prevention of many cases, with procedures such as the HPV test playing a role in reducing cervical cancer.