

STIEF 

HPV and anal cancer



What is HPV?

- Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a sexually transmitted infection that can infect the oropharynx (tonsils and back of the throat), genitals and anus.
- There are many types of HPV. Some strains of HPV can cause warts and cancer.
- HPV is very common. Without vaccination, 80% of adults will acquire some type of genital or oral HPV infection at some point in their life.
- Some people, many years after acquiring HPV, may develop anal cancer as a result of the HPV infection. This is technically known as HPV-associated anal squamous cell cancer.

What causes anal cancer?

- Studies have shown that HPV causes most anal cancers. It is recommended that anal cancers are tested for HPV.
- Anal cancer is rare and most people who acquire HPV will not develop cancer.

How did I get an anal HPV infection?

- HPV is spread to your anus from skin-to-skin contact with someone who has HPV. It is not necessary to have had anal intercourse to acquire anal HPV.
- Having HPV does not mean that you have had many sexual partners nor that your partner has been unfaithful or has had many sexual partners.
- Many people with anal HPV have had very few sexual partners.

How common is genital and anal HPV?

- Genital/anal HPV is so common that anyone who has sex may be exposed to HPV infection during their life.
- Most people clear the infection on their own within a year or two, but in some cases HPV infection persists.

Can I transmit anal HPV to others?

Family and friends

- Anal or genital HPV is not casually transmitted to others by sharing toilet seats, clothing or bath water.

Partners

- 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 ensure they have regular cervical screening.
- The risk of HPV-related anal cancer may be slightly higher among partners of people with HPV-related anal cancer, but this cancer remains extremely rare among partners.

New sexual partners in the future

- Many people with HPV anal cancer have no detectable HPV after their anal cancer treatment.
- Discuss protection methods (e.g. condoms, dental dams or barrier protection) to practice safer sex with new partners.

How long does it take for anal cancer to develop after HPV infection?

- It is impossible to know the time from first anal 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.

Will HPV vaccination help me?

- The HPV vaccine offers the best protection against HPV if given before becoming sexually active.
- For people who are already sexually active, the vaccine may still be of benefit as it will prevent the acquisition of new HPV infections for the strains covered by the vaccine.
- The vaccine will not help clear an infection you already have.
- The HPV vaccine (Gardasil 9) is licensed for use in New Zealand for anyone aged 9-45 years. The vaccine is free for everyone aged 9-26 years (inclusive). Ask your health care provider for further information or to get the vaccine (see *HPV Vaccination* pamphlet on hpv.org.nz).

Is there screening for anal cancer?

- Unlike cervical cancer, there is no screening for HPV-related anal cancer in Aotearoa New Zealand.
- International guidelines for anal cancer screening were published in early 2024 and we are hopeful that these may be rolled out in New Zealand soon.
- Most people with anal cancer experience bleeding, itching, or a lump around their anus. If you have any of these symptoms, speak to your primary healthcare provider.

Produced in collaboration with:

Where can I get further information?

- New Zealand HPV Project website **hpv.org.nz**
- New Zealand HPV Project Helpline Toll free **0508 11 12 13**
- Your primary health provider, Sexual Wellbeing Aotearoa clinic or sexual health clinic

Sexually Transmitted Infections Education Foundation

Copies of this pamphlet are available from:

STIEF, PO Box 2437, Shortland Street,
Auckland 1140, New Zealand

info@stief.org.nz
stief.org.nz

The New Zealand HPV Project

hpv.org.nz

Helpline toll free: **0508 11 12 13**

Phone: **09 433 6526**



**View our sexual health website for rangatahi, including a
national database of sexual health providers:**

justthefacts.co.nz

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