Human Papillomavirus (HPV): Questions and Answers

INFORMATION ABOUT THE DISEASE AND VACCINES

How common is HPV in the United States?
HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection in the United States. About 79 million Americans are currently infected with HPV. About 14 million people become newly infected each year. HPV is so common that most sexually active men and women will get at least one type of HPV at some point in their lives.

An estimated 29,600 HPV-associated cancers occur annually in the U.S., including an estimated 9,300 HPV-associated cancers in males. Of these HPV-associated cancers approximately 64% are caused by HPV types 16 and 18, which are included in all three HPV vaccines available in the United States and about 10% are caused by the 5 HPV types also included in Gardasil 9.

How does HPV spread?
HPV is spread through contact with infected skin, usually through sexual contact. Most infected people have no symptoms and are unaware they are infected and can transmit the virus to a sex partner. Rarely, a pregnant woman passes HPV to her baby during vaginal delivery.

What are the symptoms of HPV?
Most people who become infected with HPV have no symptoms. Some people develop visible genital warts, or have pre-cancerous changes in the cervix, vulva, anus, or penis. Genital warts usually appear as soft, moist, pink, or flesh-colored swellings, usually in the genital area. They can be raised or flat, single or multiple, small or large, and sometimes cauliflower shaped. They can appear on the vulva, in or around the vagina or anus, on the cervix, and on the penis, scrotum, groin, or thigh. After sexual contact with an infected person, warts may appear within weeks or months, or not at all.

How serious is HPV?
Most HPV infections don’t cause any symptoms and eventually go away, as the body’s own defense system clears the virus. Women with short-term HPV infections may develop mild Pap test abnormalities that go away with time.

A small percentage of people infected with HPV develop persistent (chronic) HPV infection. Women with persistent high-risk HPV infections are at greatest risk for developing cervical cancer precursor lesions (abnormal cells on the lining of the cervix) and cervical cancer. (See next question.)

What are possible complications from HPV?
Cervical cancer is the most serious HPV infection. Persistent HPV is associated with cervical cancer. The American Cancer Society 2015, approximately 1 in 40 women will develop cervical cancer. About 10 to 15% of people with meningococcal disease die even with appropriate antibiotic treatment.

How long does it take to show signs of meningococcal disease after being exposed?
The incubation period of meningococcal disease is 3 to 5 days, with a range of 2 to 10 days. Meningococcal disease is caused by the bacterium Neisseria meningitidis. This bacterium has at least 13 different subtypes (serogroups). Five of these serogroups, A, B, C, Y, and W, cause almost all invasive disease. The relative importance of these five serogroups depends on geographic location and other factors. In the United States, almost all meningococcal disease is caused by serogroups B, C, and Y. Each serogroup accounts for about one third of reported cases.

How does meningococcal disease spread?
The disease is spread person-to-person through the exchange of respiratory and throat secretions (e.g., by coughing, kissing, or sharing eating utensils). Meningococcal disease is caused by serogroups B, C, and Y. Each serogroup accounts for about one third of reported cases.

What causes meningococcal disease?
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Can’t meningitis be caused by a virus too?
Yes. The word “meningitis” refers to inflammation of the tissues covering the brain and spinal cord. This inflammation can be caused by viruses and fungi, as well as bacteria. Viral meningitis is the most common type; it has no specific treatment but is usually not as serious as meningitis caused by bacteria.

What are possible complications from meningococcal disease?
Cancer is the most serious possible complication from HPV infection. Persistent infection with high-risk types of HPV is associated with cervical cancer. Persistent infection with low-risk types of HPV can be a factor in the development of cervical cancer.

What people are at special risk for meningococcal disease?
Meningococcal disease is uncommon in the United States, and the symptoms can be mistaken for other illnesses, which unfortunately can lead to delayed diagnosis and treatment.

Meningococcal: Questions and Answers

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LITIGATION OVER DISEASES

Updated Meningococcal Questions and Answers and Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Questions and Answers

Information about the diseases and vaccines