

Eight out of 10 Canadians will be infected with HPV in their lifetimes – will you be one of them?

Not if the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada has anything to do with it. The SOGC is urging young adults to expose what lurks between the sheets in order to protect themselves against this highly contagious – and potentially dangerous – virus.

HPV, or the human papillomavirus, is a common sexually transmitted infection. So common, in fact, that there are over 100 different types of HPV. Most will clear on their own within two years, without you even knowing you had it, however some are more persistent and may lead to long-term consequences. Also, certain sexually transmitted strains can cause genital warts, and others can even cause cancer. The warts can vary in size and appearance, ranging from growths that look flat, raised, or even cauliflower-shaped. The swellings can sometimes be itchy, and if they're allowed to grow they can cause sores, bleeding, and can even block vaginal openings.

You're probably thinking that someone would have to be pretty clueless to hook up with a partner who's covered in genital warts. But there's just one problem - not everyone infected will have symptoms. So, whether you're all about staying exclusive or playing the field, a partner can still pass HPV on to you without even knowing they have it.

And as if the thought of genital warts isn't enough to kill the mood, other types of HPV are the number one cause of cervical cancer. It's a serious disease - this year, about 1,350 women will be diagnosed with it, and another 400 will die from it.

Condoms do provide a safety net against HPV, but they can't promise to be 100% effective. This is because HPV spreads so easily that all it takes is skin-to-skin sexual contact for it to make the jump from one person to the next, and a condom might not completely cover an infected area.

There's too much of a risk involved to stay powerless against HPV. Up to 80% of Canadians will be exposed to it, many before they turn 26 years old, so why not make today the day you take charge of your sexual health? Since HPV infections can go undetected, getting regular Pap smears should be at the top of every young woman's to-do list. It's the best way of identifying HPV and catching early signs of cervical cancer before it's too late.

Of course, prevention is just as important as awareness. In case you're not convinced, let's get into some more heavy

numbers: The one and only option that provides close to 100% protection against HPV types 16 and 18, which cause about 70% of cervical cancers, as well as types 6 and 11, which cause 90% of genital warts, is the HPV vaccination. Medical experts, such as the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, recommend vaccination of all women aged nine to 26. But don't think that once you're vaccinated it means no more Pap tests. It's not a question of choosing one or the other –



“Genital what?!!”

HPV
Yes, genital warts.
It can even lead to cancer.
You can get it through intimate skin contact.
You don't even need to have sex.
Unfortunately condoms won't fully protect you.

Vaccination is recommended for
ALL Canadian young women aged 9 - 26

Spread the **word** not the **disease**
Knowledge, screening and vaccination can help.
hpvinfo.ca

THE SOCIETY OF OBSTETRICIANS AND GYNAECOLOGISTS OF CANADA

they're both important components in the fight against HPV. This year, more than 400,000 women will have an abnormal Pap smear, many indicating pre-cancerous conditions.

Getting informed is another major component in keeping your body and your sex life healthy. This doesn't just go for young women, but young men as well. A recent study found out that less than a third of both men and women have ever heard of HPV. Rise above the statistics. Get all the facts at www.hpvinfo.ca and talk to a doctor about protecting yourself, and your partners.