

HPV & Anal Cancer

Talk to your doctor and get checked out!

The Facts

- Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) worldwide.
- The majority of people who have HPV have no symptoms.
- Often HPV clears on its own without any medical treatment.
- There are more than 100 types of HPV. Around 40 types are passed on through sexual contact, which includes oral sex, vaginal sex or anal sex and can infect the cells of the anus (arse).
- About 14 of these types of HPV can cause anal cancer or anal lesions that can develop into cancer. These types are called 'high risk HPV'.
- Research conducted in Sydney found about three quarters of HIV positive gay men had high risk anal HPV.
- Anal HPV infection is very common in gay men. Gay men are five to 20 times more likely than heterosexual men to develop anal cancer.
- Gay men living with HIV have about 100 times the risk of anal cancer compared with the general population.
- Women living with HIV have anywhere between seven to 28 times higher risk of invasive anal cancer compared with the general female population.
- Women living with HIV who have had previous cervical dysplasia (abnormal cells) or cancer have about five times the risk of anal cancer compared with the general female population.
- Why some anal HPV infections can lead to cancer while the majority of infections do not, is not currently known.
- Many pre-cancerous lesions never progress to cancer.
- Early detection means treatment is associated with greater survival rates than treatment at later stages.



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Risk factors

- Current low CD4 count, or in the past.
- Cigarette smoking.
- Increasing age.
- It's a misconception that anal sexual activity is the only risk factor for anal HPV infection.
- If HPV is present anywhere in the genitals, it can be spread to the anus by non-sexual behaviours like front-to back wiping after using the toilet.
- Receptive anal sex with multiple partners increases your risk of anal exposure to HPV.
- The HPV virus is so easily spread that even men who never have receptive anal sex are still at increased risk.

Get vaccinated

- About 80% of young people in Australian schools are vaccinated against HPV.
- It's ideal to get vaccinated before becoming sexually active.
- Vaccination can also help protect you from reinfection.
- HPV vaccination is very effective in preventing high risk anal HPV infection before development of anal pre-cancer lesions.
- There's not much information about vaccination of people who already have HPV. The HPV vaccine could still protect you against strains of HPV you haven't already been exposed to.
- The vaccine is available to adults from your doctor. It is not subsidised by the Federal Government and will cost around \$450 over six months (approx. \$150 per dose). You will need three doses.
- If you have private health insurance, some of this cost could be covered. Talk with your insurance provider about your health cover.

Get checked out

- Your chances of survival are much higher when anal cancer is diagnosed early.
- A digital ano-rectal examination (called a DARE) is recommended to screen for anal cancer. This is an examination by your doctor and/ or yourself of the anus with a finger.
- [Our DARE factsheet provides step-by-step instructions](#) for you or a partner to perform a DARE.
- If further examination is required, your doctor can refer you to the [Dysplasia and Anal Cancer Service \(DACS\) clinic](#).
- For peer support, contact Positive Life on (02) 8357 8386 or 1800 245 67 (freecall) or email contact@positivelife.org.au

Reduce your risk

- Stop smoking.
- Practice safer sex using condoms
- Ask your doctor for a DARE each year.
- Do a self DARE on yourself and/or your partner/s.
- Get any lumps, bleeding, sores, or pain in your arse checked by your doctor.
- Talk with your doctor about getting a HPV vaccination.

"The examination was slightly uncomfortable, but it was worth doing it to know I didn't have anal cancer."



For more information phone 02 8357 8386 or 1800 245 677 (freecall) or visit www.positivelife.org.au

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The voice of all people living with HIV

Positive Life NSW