

CAUSES AND RISK FACTORS

- Genital HPV infections occur most often in teenagers and young adults.
- A mother with an active genital HPV infection could also transmit the virus to the infant during child birth.
- Oral sex with multiple partners is one of the significant risk factors for oral cancer and oropharyngeal cancer.
- The higher the number of sexual partners, the greater the risk of HPV infection.
- Men and women who reported having six or more oral sex partners during their lifetime had a nearly nine-fold increased risk of developing cancer of the tonsil or base of the tongue.

PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

Unlike cervical cancer, there is no screening in place for oropharyngeal cancers. Prevention and early detection are key to the survival of HPV-related cancers.

The role of the dental hygienist

- Provide regular examinations and oral screening.
- Give instruction on self-examination of head and neck; report any abnormalities to a dental hygienist.
- Provide advice on treatment options.
- Refer clients to a physician or nurse practitioner.

Changing sexual behaviour

- Educate youth about the risks associated with early sexual activity, oral and anal sex.
- Reduce the risk of HPV infection by reducing the number of sexual partners.

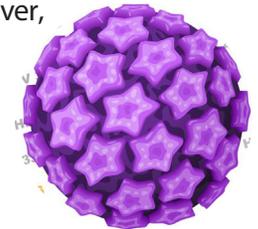
- Use barrier methods such as condoms and oral dams to help protect against HPV and other sexually transmitted infections, e.g., Chlamydia, herpes, HIV.

Treatment options

- Warts can be treated with prescription medications.
- They can be removed by a physician, e.g., cryotherapy, surgery, laser therapy.
- Removing warts does not always eliminate the HPV infection. Warts can reappear since the virus may still be present in the body.
- Abnormal cells in the cervix can be removed with cryotherapy or laser surgery.
- Vaccines are available for preventing HPV infections.

Vaccine programs

- There are two types of HPV vaccines available in Canada.
 - One is approved for females aged nine to 45 and males aged nine to 26. It protects against HPV-16 and HPV-18 that cause cervical cancers and HPV that causes genital warts.
 - The other vaccine is approved for females aged 10 to 25. It protects against HPV-16 and HPV-18 that cause cervical cancer.
- Ideally, individuals should be vaccinated prior to becoming sexually active. However, those who are already sexually active can still benefit from the HPV vaccination.



As professional health-care providers, dental hygienists are primarily concerned with promoting good oral health. Dental hygiene is among the largest of the regulated healthcare professions in the province. In Ontario all dental hygienists are registered with the College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario, which regulates the profession to ensure the public receives safe and ongoing comprehensive oral care.

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