

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

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“HPV Sexually Transmitted Infections are Widespread”

According to the CDC, human papillomavirus (HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the United States. HPV is a different virus than herpes. HPV is so common that most sexually active men and women get it at some point in their lives. Anyone who is sexually active can get HPV, even if you have had sex with only one person. You also can develop symptoms years after you have sex with someone who is infected, making it hard to know when you first became infected. There are many different types of HPV and some types can cause health problems including genital warts and cancers. But, there are vaccines that can reportedly stop these health problems from happening. Health officials are now saying about 45% of Americans ages 18 to 59 had some form of genital human papillomavirus. More concerning, about 25% of men and 20% of women had certain strains that carry a higher risk of cancer. There are more than 150 HPV viruses. Most important, the types of HPV that can cause genital warts are not the same as the types of HPV that can cause cancers. Genital warts usually appear as a small bump or group of bumps in the genital area. They can be small or large, raised or flat, or shaped like a cauliflower. HPV can cause cervical and other cancers, cancers including cancer of the vulva, vagina, penis, or anus. It can also cause cancer in the back of the throat, including the base of the tongue and tonsils (called oropharyngeal cancer). Cancer often takes years, even decades, to develop after a person gets HPV. There is no way to know which people who have HPV will develop cancer or other health problems. Fortunately, many cases of HPV go away on their own. Actually, up to 90% of HPV infections resolve spontaneously within 2 years. Even though cervical cancer is cited as the second most common cancer in women worldwide, existing data show that this only applies to developing countries. In industrialized nations, where Pap screening is common, there has been a 70% reduction in the incidence of cervical cancer during the past 50 years. Government officials are now recommending getting vaccinated with an HPV vaccine, which they claim is safe and effective. CDC recommends 11 to 12 year olds get two doses of HPV vaccine to protect against cancers caused by HPV. To the contrary, skepticism about the vaccine has been increasing for several reasons, despite reassurances from the public-health sector.

In the America that I love, please remember to always practice safe sex. Use condoms and try to be in a monogamous relationship. Check with your doctor about HPV vaccinations.

Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

Surgeon/Scientist/Patient Advocate

27439 Highway 441, Kentwood, LA 70444

985-229-6955 Home | 985-229-3760 – Fax | 985-514-0578 – Cell

rhowsmd@hughes.net | www.iwillfindthecure.org

