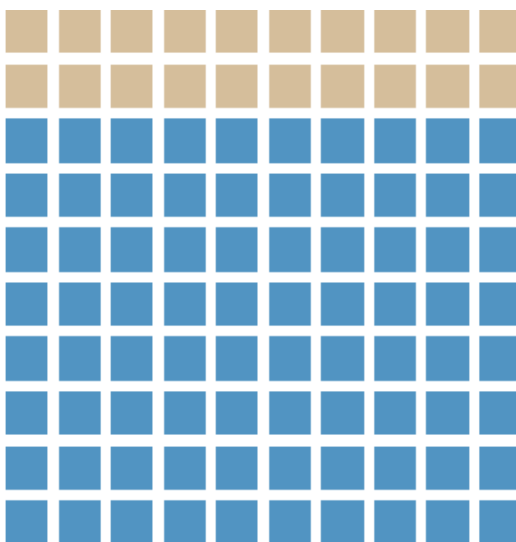
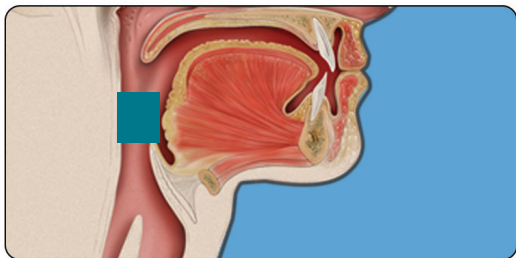


Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and Oropharyngeal Cancer – CDC



80%

of sexually active people ages 14-44 have had oral sex with an opposite sex partner

Human papillomavirus (HPV) can cause serious health problems, including genital warts and certain cancers. However, in most cases HPV goes away on its own before causing any health problems.

What is genital HPV?

Genital human papillomavirus (also called HPV) is the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the U.S. Most types of HPV are not harmful to people. There are more than 40 types of HPV that can infect the genital areas as well as the mouth and throat. Most people who become infected with HPV do not know that they are infected.

What is oral HPV?

The same types of HPV that infect the genital areas can infect the mouth and throat. HPV found in the mouth and throat is called “oral HPV.” Some types of oral HPV (known as “high risk types”) can cause cancers of the head and neck area. Other types of oral HPV (known as “low risk types”) can cause warts in the mouth or throat. In most cases, HPV infections of all types go away before they cause any health problems.

What head and neck cancers can be caused by HPV?

HPV can cause cancers in the back of the throat, most commonly in the base of the tongue and tonsils, in an area known as the “oropharynx.” These cancers are called “oropharyngeal cancers.”

How does HPV cause cancer?

HPV can cause normal cells in infected skin to turn abnormal. Most of the time, you cannot see or feel these cell changes. In most cases, the body fights off the HPV infection naturally and infected cells then go back to normal. But in cases when the body does not fight off this virus, HPV can cause visible changes and certain types of HPV can cause an oropharyngeal cancer. Cancer caused by HPV often takes years to develop after initially getting an HPV infection. It is unclear if having HPV alone is sufficient to cause oropharyngeal cancers, or if other factors (such as smoking or chewing tobacco) interact with HPV to cause these cancers. More research is needed to understand all the factors leading to oropharyngeal cancers.

What are the signs and symptoms of oropharyngeal cancer?

Signs and symptoms may include persistent sore throat, earaches, hoarseness, enlarged lymph nodes, pain when swallowing, and unexplained weight loss. Some persons have no signs or symptoms.

