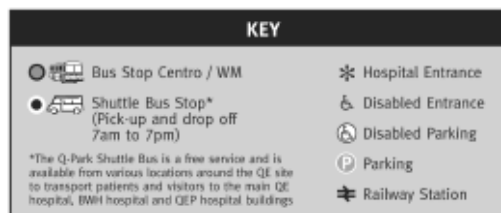
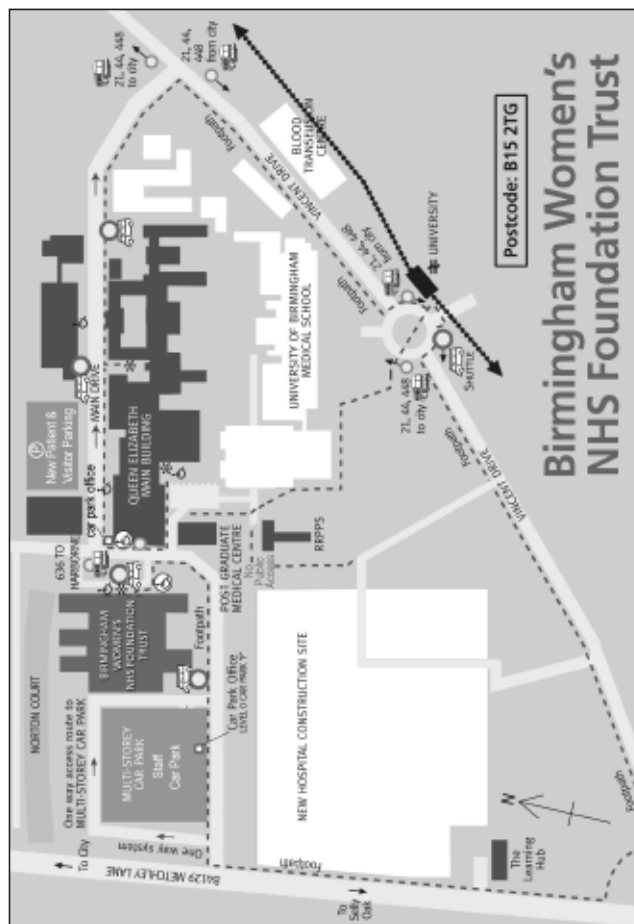


What can I do to get rid of HPV or prevent catching it? *cont/d...*

Key facts:

- HPV is extremely common (1 in 20 women).
- There are over 100 types of HPV.
- Some types of HPV cause cancer of the cervix.
- Most HPV infections go away on their own and do not cause cancer.



Authors: **Sam Venner & Debbie Wise**
Clinical Nurse Specialists - Colposcopy

Colposcopy Department
Tel: 0121 607 4705

Ref 44/01/2010 Review 01/2013

Birmingham Women's **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TG
Tel: 0121 472 1377 Fax: 0121 627 2602

Birmingham Women's **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust



Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

Patient Information

What are Human Papillomaviruses?

Human papillomaviruses (HPV's) are a family of viruses of which there are at least 100 types. Although they belong to the same family they all behave differently. For example, one type causes verrucas on the feet but it is not the same as that which causes genital warts. This in turn is not the same as the types of HPV that are associated with pre-cancer and cancer of the cervix.

Human Papillomavirus and your cervix

Over 30 types of HPV can be found on the cervix. They are transferred by skin to skin contact, usually during sex. If HPV is detected on a test we cannot tell for certain how long the infection has been present nor where it came from. HPV can be present for a number of years but may not cause any problems to your cervix.

High Risk and Low Risk HPV

HPV types that can affect your cervix are described as 'higher risk' and 'low risk'. 'Low risk' types may be present on your cervix and can show up in your smear but are not thought to be connected with cervical cancer. 'Higher risk' types, however, are known to be a cause of cervical cancer in some women. Most women who have 'higher risk' HPV will never get cancer of the cervix.

Co-factors

It is thought that HPV does not cause cancer on its own but needs help from something else - a co-factor. For example, it has been shown that women whose immune system is not working properly are more likely to develop cancer.

Smoking may also affect the immune system and smokers are twice as likely to get cervical cancer as non-smokers. However, if you stop smoking, things can improve.

If I have HPV will I get Cervical Cancer?

It is highly unlikely. For a start, many women catch HPV but their own immune system deals with it, just as you can catch a cold and your body gets rid of the virus on its own. Even if the infection persists you may not develop cancer. However, the risk is greater.

Remember also that the abnormal cell changes which precede cervical cancer provide an early warning system, so that you can be checked and treated well before a cancer could actually develop.

Just testing positive for HPV does not mean you need any treatment, unless abnormal cells develop.

How do I know if I have HPV?

If you are told you have HPV following a smear or Colposcopy we cannot tell whether it is the 'higher risk' or 'low risk' type.

What is important is whether there are abnormal cell changes which can be picked up by a smear test. The only way to test for 'higher risk' types of HPV is with a special biochemical test which is not currently available on the NHS. This test will only tell if you had HPV at the moment it was taken. It does not tell you whether it is cause abnormal cells to develop. Nor will it tell you whether your immune system has since got rid of the virus.

What can I do to get rid of HPV or prevent catching it?

There is currently no medical treatment (such as a tablet or cream) that can get rid of HPV. If you have abnormal cells on your cervix picked up by your smear, or during colposcopy, you can be treated. This is quite straight forward and involves removing a small piece of tissue from your cervix under local anaesthetic.

Things you could do:

- Use condoms - this may provide some protection against catching HPV - but the virus may be passed through other sexual contact.
- Look after yourself to keep your immune system strong.
- Stop smoking.