

Plain Language Summary

Title: HPV Treatment: What's the next step?

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Plain Language Summary:

What is HPV?

HPV (Human Papilloma Virus) is a virus that can cause certain types of cancer in humans. People are infected with the virus by sexual contact and can even be infected while using condoms. The virus is carried by both men and women, although it usually only causes cancer in women.

What is a Pap smear?

This is a screening test that uses a small brush to scrape loose cells off of the surface of the cervix. This is the area that usually affected by HPV, so by looking at these cells under a microscope, doctors can see whether your cells have been infected.

What is the treatment?

There are several options once HPV is diagnosed.

- Watch and wait - Sometimes the infected cells heal on their own if given enough time. The changes caused by the virus that lead to cancer take many years to progress, so you can get frequent checkups to see if the infection clears up by itself.
- Cryotherapy – Infected cells can be frozen with liquid nitrogen.
- LEEP (Loop Electrosurgical Excision Procedure) – Infected cells are removed with a painless electrical current.
- Conization (cone biopsy) – This procedure removes the infected area.

The watch and wait approach is a good first choice due to the cost and risk of the surgical treatments. One possible risk of having surgery is cervical incompetence, which can be problematic during pregnancy, because the cervix may be weakened causing a baby to be born too early.

Also, it has been found that in more than half of cases, the infection does get better on its own, so the most important thing is to see your doctor regularly to get checked.

Additional Resources:

Cervical Cancer: Natinal Institutes of Health

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001895/>

Cervical Cancer: Mayo Clinic

<http://www.mayoclinic.org/cervical-cancer/>

Key Words:

HPV

STD/STI

Pap

Colposcopy

Cervical cancer

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