



HPV-Positive Oropharyngeal Squamous Cell Cancer (HPV-OSCC)

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a sexually transmitted infection that can infect the oropharynx (tonsils and back of throat), anus, and genitals. HPV can cause cancer, warts or have no effect. There are many types of HPV, making HPV very common in the U.S. Over 20 million Americans have some type of genital or oral HPV infection. In some people, however, oral HPV infection can lead to HPV-OSCC after many years.

What causes Oropharyngeal Cancer?

- ◆ HPV now causes most oropharyngeal cancers in the U.S.
- ◆ It is recommended that oropharyngeal tumors be tested for HPV.
- ◆ Smoking and alcohol use can also cause oropharyngeal cancer.

How did I get an oral HPV infection?

- ◆ HPV is transmitted to your mouth by oral sex. It may also be possible to get oral HPV by other ways.
- ◆ Performing oral sex and having many oral sex partners can increase your chances of oral HPV infection.
- ◆ Having an oral HPV infection does not mean your partner was/is unfaithful and does not suggest promiscuity.
- ◆ Many people with HPV-OSCC have only had a few oral sex partners in their lives.

Who has an oral HPV infection?

- ◆ Many people will likely be exposed to oral HPV in their life.
- ◆ Around 10% of men and 3.6% of women in the U.S. have HPV in their mouths and HPV infection is more commonly found with older age.
- ◆ Most people clear the infections on their own within a year or two, but in some people the HPV infection persists.

Can I transmit oral HPV infections to others?

- ◆ Oral HPV is not casually transmitted by sharing drinks or kissing on the cheek.
- ◆ We do not know if open mouth kissing can transmit HPV.

Partners of people with HPV-OSCC:

- ◆ You have already likely shared whatever infections you have.
- ◆ You do not need to change your sexual behavior.

- ◆ Female partners should have regular cervical Pap screenings.

Future sexual partners:

- ◆ Many patients with HPV-OSCC no longer have HPV detectable in their mouth after treatment, while others do.
- ◆ With new partners, discuss protection methods (e.g. condoms and barrier protection).

When did I get this infection?

- ◆ We do not know the timeframe from first oral HPV infection to cancer, but it takes many years.
- ◆ We know that some people have an infection 15 years or more before developing cancer.

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What causes Oropharyngeal Cancer?

- ◆ Oropharyngeal cancer patients with HPV in their tumor live longer, on average, than people without HPV (i.e. HPV-positive tumors usually respond well to therapy).
- ◆ However; patients who currently smoke tobacco or have smoked for a long time in the past, do not live as long as patients who have never smoked. Patients who are current smokers should consider quitting.

Will the HPV vaccine help me?

- ◆ The HPV vaccine prevents people from getting new HPV infections.
- ◆ The vaccine will not help you clear an infection you already have.
- ◆ The vaccine is recommended for people ages 9-26 years old.

Will my spouse / partner also get HPV-OSCC?

- ◆ The risk of HPV-OSCC may be slightly higher among spouses of those with HPV-OSCC, but this cancer remains rare among spouses.
- ◆ There are no recommended screening tests for HPV-OSCC.

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