

COSMOPOLITAN

EXPERTS

sex advice

from Amy Levine, Cosmo's Carnal Counselor

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"Must I tell my sexual partner that I have HPV?"

Q I was recently diagnosed with a type of HPV that doesn't cause genital warts but may increase a woman's risk of cervical cancer. Must I tell my partner I have it? I've heard that most people contract it anyway, so what's the point of telling him?

A Yes, you should tell your partner about your diagnosis of HPV (human papillomavirus). By sharing your sexual health history, you'll not only inform your man, you'll also open the door for him to divulge any STDs that he may have. After all, you want to protect yourself, too! Bring up the subject when you're both just hanging out together relaxing -- not when you're about to have sex. In a matter-of-fact tone, start by saying something like, "I really care about you and want to talk about safer sex." If you're calm, he'll likely be, too. Here are some facts so you'll be prepared.

- HPV is not completely understood. As you suspected, it's the most common STD. Researchers believe that as many as three out of four sexually active people will get at least one of the 30 sexually transmitted strains at some point in their lives. It's transmitted by direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected area during sexual activity -- including genital rubbing and oral, vaginal or anal sex -- whether or not symptoms are present. Therefore, putting on a condom before any contact takes place can help reduce the chance of infection. Once transmitted, the virus can take weeks, months or years to manifest. But HPV is often more of a nuisance than a danger. Some types cause genital warts; others cause cell changes on a woman's cervix. But it's also possible to have the virus and be symptom-free.
- HPV is usually diagnosed when a genital wart appears or if a woman tests positive for it through a cervical screening. (You can be tested specifically for the types of HPV commonly associated with cervical cancer, which if caught early, treated as necessary and monitored as recommended, need not lead to cancer.) Otherwise, it's very difficult for you to detect. The good news is that the majority of infections eventually go away on their own.
- After you tell your guy all this, he'll probably want to know what this means for him. Explain that most men who are infected by the types of strains you have are usually symptom-free, but it's possible that he can pass the virus on to other women. Then, let him know that

condoms will likely decrease the chances of transmission.

If either of you wants more information about HPV, call the National STD Hotline at (800) 342-2437 (open 24 hours, seven days a week) or the national HPV hotline at (877) HPV-5868 (open 2pm to 7pm EST, Monday-Friday).

Check out [The Test That Can Save Your Life](#) for more on HPV, the importance of pap-smears, and getting the most out of your gyno visits.

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