Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly, are effective at reducing the risk of transmission of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Latex condoms can reduce—but not totally eliminate—the risk of HPV transmission.

How can you avoid getting HPV or genital warts?
Latex condoms used the right way from start to finish each time you have sex, may provide protection, but only for the area of the skin that they cover. Keep in mind a new partner may have HPV from a previous relationship and not know. In a new relationship, you and your partner might want to first discuss your sexual health with a healthcare provider.

Spermicidal foams, jellies and creams are not proven to work against HPV and genital warts, and some research indicates these products may irritate sensitive genital skin (especially with women), perhaps making it easier to contract sexually transmitted infections (STIs). For this reason, use of spermicides is not recommended.

What about HPV vaccines?
There are currently three HPV vaccines available. Gardasil®, available for both males and females, is close to 100% effective at preventing infection associated with HPV types 6 and 11 (types associated with 90% of all genital warts) and types 16 and 18 (types associated with 70% of all cervical cancers, and many anal, vulvar and vaginal cancers). Cervarix®, a vaccine just for women, is also close to 100% effective at preventing infection associated with HPV 16 and 18. Gardasil 9® covers nine HPV types: the two low-risk types that cause most cases of genital warts along with seven high-risk types found in a number of cancers. Experts recommend that all females between the ages of 9 and 26 get an HPV vaccine. Males are at risk for HPV and related diseases, too, so boys and young men are also recommended to be vaccinated.

Is it normal to feel emotional or upset about having HPV or genital warts?
Yes! Some people feel very upset. If you are worried about HPV or genital warts, remember:
- Symptoms of genital warts can be managed.
- Cervical cancer, the most serious problem associated with some types of genital HPV, is easily prevented through Pap tests (and HPV tests when appropriate) on a regular basis and follow-up for any precancerous cell changes.
- You are not alone! It is estimated that tens of millions of Americans have HPV. For those who do experience symptoms, it tends to be a minor problem that can be resolved.
What is HPV?
Human papillomavirus (HPV) is the name of a group of viruses that infect the skin. There are over 100 different types of HPV. Some types of HPV can cause genital warts and other types can cause cervical cell changes in women. These types of HPV are sexually transmitted.

The “high-risk” HPV types that cause cell changes to the cervix can, if not found, increase a woman’s chance of developing cervical cancer. The “low-risk” types that cause genital warts are almost never found with cervical cancers. But most HPV infections do not cause symptoms that are noticeable. Most people never know they have the virus.

What do genital warts look like?
Genital warts are growths or bumps that appear on the vulva, in or around the vagina or anus, on the cervix, or on the penis, scrotum or groin. They may be raised or flat, single or multiple, small or large.

Who gets HPV or genital warts?
HPV infection, including genital warts, affects sexually active men and women of all ages, races, social classes and sexual orientation. The majority of sexually active people are exposed to HPV during their lifetime, but most cases are cleared naturally and are never diagnosed.

How do you get HPV or genital warts?
HPV and genital warts are usually spread by direct, skin-to-skin contact during vaginal, anal or (possibly) oral sex with someone who has an infection. Warts on other parts of the body, such as the hands, are caused by different types of HPV. People do not get genital warts by coming in contact with warts on the hands or the feet.

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How long do you have HPV before it is diagnosed?
Warts may appear within several weeks after sex with a person who has HPV, or they may take months or years to appear, or they may never appear. It might take weeks, months, or even years after exposure to HPV before cervical cell changes are detected. This makes it hard to know exactly when you got the virus, or from whom.

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How are genital warts diagnosed?
Warts can be small and very hard to see, even during a medical exam. Also, sometimes it is hard to tell the difference between a wart and normal bumps or pimples. If you think you have warts, or have been exposed to HPV, go to a healthcare provider. A healthcare provider will check you more closely and may use a magnifying lens to find small warts.

How are cervical cell changes detected?
A Pap test is used to find abnormal changes in the cells of the cervix. Precancerous cervical changes are caused by HPV. Women with abnormal Pap results should either be followed closely with regular screening, or examined for further cervical problems. This may involve a colposcopy, where a healthcare provider uses a special microscope (colposcope) to closely inspect the cervix.

For women age 30 and over, an HPV test may be used along with a Pap. HPV tests can find any of the high-risk types of HPV that are common and in cervical cancer. One HPV test has recently been approved for use as primary cervical cancer screening for women age 25 and older, followed by a Pap test for women with certain results. A healthcare provider can help explain which test is right for you.

How are genital warts treated?
There are several treatments for genital warts. The goal of any treatment should be to remove visible genital warts to get rid of symptoms. No one treatment is best for all cases. The guidelines of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) include the following:

- Imiquimod (Aldara®) cream, Podofilox (Condylox®) cream/gel, and Sinecatechins ointment are self-applied treatments for external genital warts sold by prescription. Over the counter wart treatments should never be used in the genital area.
- Podophyllin and Trichloroacetic acid (TCA) are chemicals applied by a healthcare provider. Podophyllin should not be used with pregnant women.
- Cryotherapy (freezing off warts with liquid nitrogen) is relatively inexpensive, but must be done by a healthcare provider.
- Electrocautery removes warts with an electric blade, wire, or needle.
- Laser therapy (using an intense light to destroy warts) or surgery (cutting off warts) has the advantage of getting rid of warts in a single office visit. Due to cost, laser is not commonly used as a front-line treatment for warts.

When choosing what treatment to use, your healthcare provider will consider the size, location and number of warts; changes in the warts; patient preference; cost of treatment; convenience; adverse effects; and their own experience with the treatments. Treatment will take only one session for some, while others may have to return several times.

How are cervical cell changes treated?
Most cases of mild cervical cell changes are not dangerous and go away on their own. Many healthcare providers opt to take care of women with a “watch and wait” approach of frequent follow up exams rather than treatment.

When treatment is needed, options include cryosurgery (freezing off abnormal tissue), laser (a powerful beam of light to cut or destroy tissue), LEEP (also known as LOOP or LLETZ), using a thin, electrically charged wire to cut away abnormal cells, and cone biopsy (removing a cone-shaped piece of tissue with a surgical knife, laser, or LOOP). Ask your healthcare provider to tell you about the treatment chosen for you.

Can HPV and genital warts be cured?
None of the treatments listed above is a cure for HPV. The virus can remain within skin cells even after treatment. Because the virus can lie dormant in cells, warts can return after treatment. However, once clear for several months, most people with genital warts never have any come back. Some experts believe this may be because a person’s own immune system helps to either suppress, or possibly clear, the virus after some time.

What about HPV, genital warts and pregnancy?
A pregnant woman should notify her healthcare provider if she or her partner(s) has had HPV or genital warts. Keep