

# Alcune informazioni sul virus HPV: informazioni brevi per le utenti

## SOME INFORMATION ON HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS (HPV): CONCISE INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS



**GISCI**

*Gruppo Italiano Screening del Cervicocarcinoma*

Inglese



This information is provided in particular for women offered an HPV test as part of the cervical cancer preventative screening programs.

### 1. What is HPV?

HPV (human papillomavirus) is a virus responsible for a very common infection, which most people will get at least once in their lives.

### 2. What does this infection do?

- ◆ Usually, it does not cause any physiological changes and clears up by itself.
- ◆ Occasionally, however, it can lead to cervical lesions. Most of these lesions will, in turn, heal by themselves; some, however, if not treated, can slowly turn cancerous.
- ◆ It takes a long time for these lesions to turn into tumours, however, and a very small percentage of women who get an HPV infection will actually develop cervical cancer.

### 3. How long does an HPV infection last?

- ◆ The great majority of these infections clear up spontaneously, 50% over the course of the first year and 80% within two years.
- ◆ When the infection disappears, this means that the risk is also no longer present.

### 4. How do you catch it?

- ◆ HPV is sexually transmitted, although it does not necessarily require full penetrative intercourse with ejaculation in order to be passed on.
- ◆ In some cases, the infection can be transmitted by one partner to the other many years after they initially caught it.
- ◆ Having this infection may therefore have nothing to do with your current partner.

### 5. How is it treated?

- ◆ There is currently no cure for this infection. It should be noted that antibiotics, vaginal suppositories and vaginal douching have proven to be ineffective.
- ◆ The most important thing, should an HPV test come back positive, is to identify any changes caused by the virus in good time – that is what we are looking for with the Pap smear test.
- ◆ Taking part in the screening program is therefore the most effective thing that women can do to protect themselves.

### 6. Can it be prevented?

- ◆ HPV is very difficult to prevent: it is a very common infection, particularly amongst young people, and even condoms do not offer 100% protection.
- ◆ For the last few years, a vaccine has been available which protects against some strains of the virus which are responsible for the majority of cervical cancers.

### 7. What is the HPV test and how do you take it?

- ◆ The HPV test is a laboratory exam which looks for the virus, and it is performed on a sample taken in the same way as a Pap smear.



## 8. Why are HPV tests performed?

The HPV test is taken for various reasons:

- ◆ As a screening test instead of the Pap test from the age of 30-35 upwards. In this case, if the HPV test is positive then the Pap smear test becomes a complementary exam known as a *triage* test because it selects the women who have changes at the cellular level and must undergo a colposcopy.
- ◆ As a triage test to select the women for whom cell changes (known as ASC-US or LSIL) have been found in the Pap test who must undergo a colposcopy. In this case the HPV test is a complementary exam.
- ◆ To follow up on patients who have had a positive HPV or Pap smear followed by a negative colposcopy, or in whom mild lesions have been found.
- ◆ To follow up on patients who have had treatment for pre-cancerous cervical lesions.

## 9. What is a colposcopy?

- ◆ Colposcopy is an examination similar to a gynaecological exam: the gynaecologist uses an instrument known as a colposcope, which provides an illuminated and magnified view of the cervix.
- ◆ If the gynaecologist sees any physiological changes, they will perform a biopsy (a small tissue sample taken from the cervix).
- ◆ Colposcopy is a generally painless procedure. If a biopsy were necessary, you might feel slight discomfort, similar to an injection or other mild pain.
- ◆ Following a colposcopy, you may sometimes notice spotting which will usually clear up quickly.

## 10. What happens after a colposcopy?

- ◆ If your cervix is normal or only has mild lesions, you will not require any treatment and the gynaecologist will tell you what checks will be required in the future.
- ◆ If, on the other hand, the gynaecologist finds lesions requiring treatment, you will be referred by the screening program to a specialised centre where you will be able to undergo this treatment free of charge.

## 11. How can I get more information on HPV?

- ◆ Read *Altre informazioni sul virus HPV: informazioni approfondite per le utenti* (further information on HPV: in-depth information for patients), available on the following websites: [www.ossevatorionazionale.screening.it](http://www.ossevatorionazionale.screening.it) and [www.gisci.it](http://www.gisci.it).

**Gruppo di lavoro**

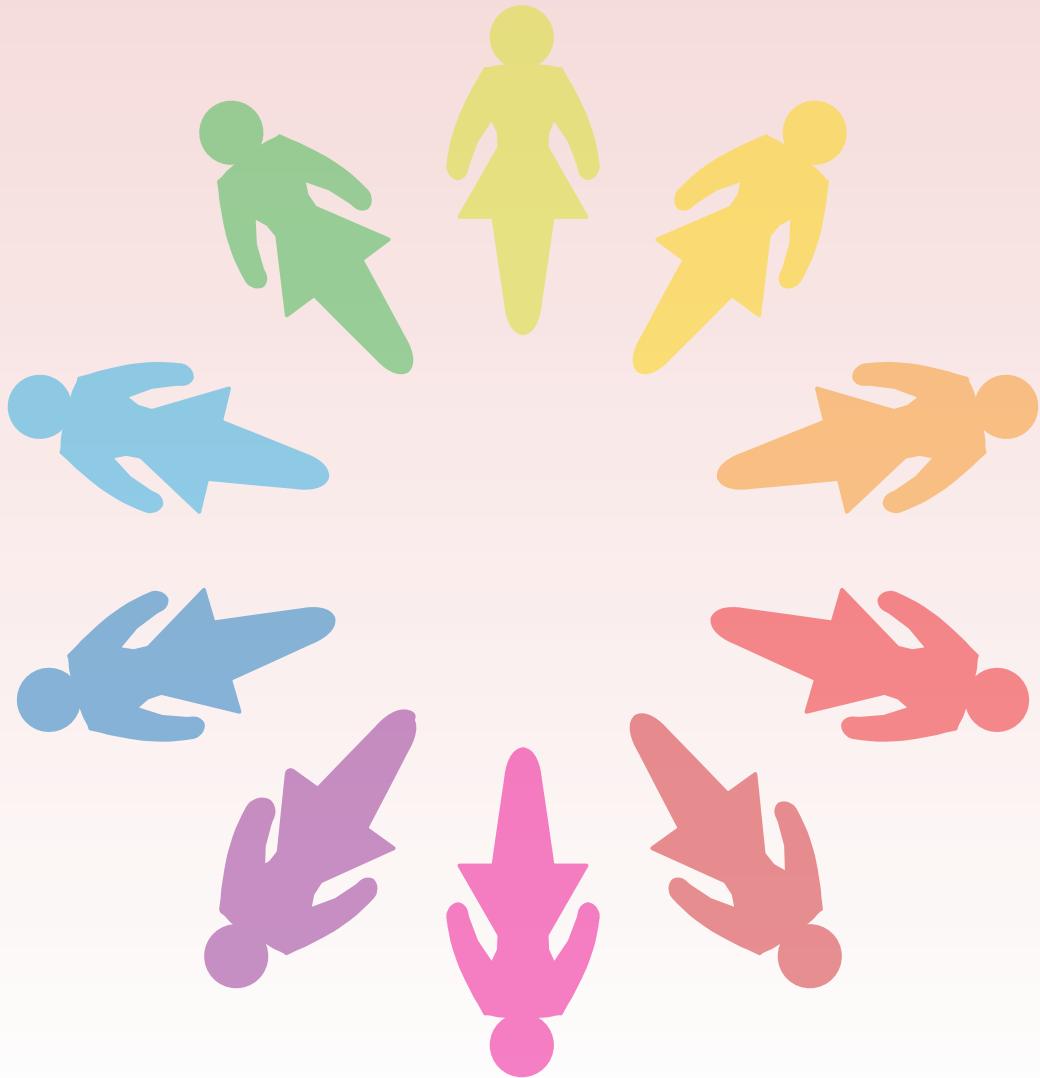
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