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### Patient Teaching Sheet for Human Papillomavirus

**Definition:** Genital Human HPV infection is caused by a sexually transmitted human papillomavirus. There are more than 100 strains of human papillomavirus but approximately 30 strains of the virus are sexually transmitted. The STD, HPV, can infect the genital areas of both men and women including the skin of the penis, scrotum, vulva (outside of the vagina), vagina, anus, cervix, or rectum. Many men and women do not even know they have been infected and are passing it on to their partners.

**Population Affected:** Approximately 20 million people are infected with HPV. Fifty percent of men and women who are sexually active acquire HPV infection at some point in their lives. Most women, by the age of fifty will have had HPV. About 6.2 million Americans will get a new case of HPV each year.

**How it's passed:** HPV is primarily passed through genital-to-genital contact (vaginal, anal, and oral). This includes other contact involving the genital area (hand to genital contact). It is not possible to get infected with HPV by touching a toilet seat. Most people who are infected do not have any signs or symptoms. On rare occasions, a pregnant woman can pass HPV to her baby during delivery. A baby who is infected that way can develop warts on its voice box and eyes.

**Signs and Symptoms:** Many people do not realize they have it and are symptom free. If symptoms occur the following will be noted by an infected person:

- a. Warts usually appear as soft, moist, pink, or flesh-colored lesions mainly in the genital area for both men and women. They can appear raised, flat, single, multiple, small, large, and sometimes cauliflower shaped. After sexual contact, warts may not appear for weeks, months, even years.
- b. Sometimes, the warts can itch and burn a bit.

**Diagnosis:** HPV can be diagnosed by the primary care provider if there are visible lesions on the patient's genitalia. Most women are diagnosed through the Pap smear. There is not a specific HPV test for men.

- a. There is a connection between HPV and cervical cancer for women. There are ten strains of HPV that are known to cause cancer. The American Cancer Society estimates that in 2004, about 10,520 women will develop invasive cervical cancer and about 3,900 women will die from this disease.

**Cure:** There is no cure for HPV. Once you have it, you have it for life and are always a carrier of the virus.

**Treatments:** Even though there is not a cure for HPV; there are effective treatments available. The best way to avoid HPV is to abstain from sexual intercourse and avoid genital-to-genital contact. People who are in a committed or casual sexual relationship should discuss their past sexual partners and healths, limit sexual partners, and always use a condom.