Practicing safer sex by using a condom can prevent some sexually transmitted infections. However, condoms have not been proven to protect against genital HPV.

A vaccine is available to protect against diseases caused by the specific genital human papillomaviruses contained in the vaccine. These HPV viruses can cause genital warts, anal cancer, and precancers of the cervix, vulva, and vagina. Talk to your doctor if you have questions about the HPV vaccine.

What are the symptoms of genital HPV?
In most cases, genital HPV does not have any symptoms. Some types of low-risk HPV may cause genital warts. Genital warts can differ in size, shape, and color. They can cause itching or irritation, but are not painful.

What is the treatment for genital HPV?
There is no treatment that will cure an HPV infection. Most of the time, genital HPV goes away because the immune system clears it. To keep the immune system strong, don’t smoke. Smoking can weaken the immune system, making it difficult to clear genital HPV.

Genital warts caused by HPV often go away without treatment. There are treatments for warts, including medication or surgery. Talk to your doctor about treatment options if you have questions or concerns.

How can you protect yourself?
If you’ve ever had sexual contact, you should have a Pap test every 3 years to find and treat cell changes in the cervix before they develop into cervical cancer.

Warts or Herpes?
For some people, it can be hard to tell the difference between genital warts and genital herpes. Genital herpes is also caused by a virus, but it’s not the same virus as HPV. The herpes virus usually causes painful, itchy blisters on the genital area that rupture and turn into sores. These sores usually heal without treatment in about three weeks.
Genital HPV (human papillomavirus)

- What is genital HPV?
- Why is there concern about HPV?
- How can you protect yourself?

Resources: Where can I get more information?

The Group Health Resource Line can provide information on a variety of health topics. Call weekdays from 9 am to 4 pm 1-800-992-2279, or e-mail us at resource.l@ghc.org.

Visit the Group Health website at www.ghc.org and consult the Health and Wellness Resources section for information on various health topics.

The information presented in this pamphlet was adapted from material from the Centers for Disease Control. It is not intended to diagnose health problems or to take the place of professional medical care.