



Papillomavirus

WHAT IS IT AND HOW TO PREVENT IT?



Papillomavirus infection is the most common sexually transmitted infection. It is more prevalent in the female population and can cause cervical cancer.

The trump card in the battle against papillomavirus infection is prevention: the Veneto Region promotes a screening programme that provides free regular testing.

THE PAPILOMAVIRUS

(Il papillomavirus)

WHAT IS IT? (Cos'è)

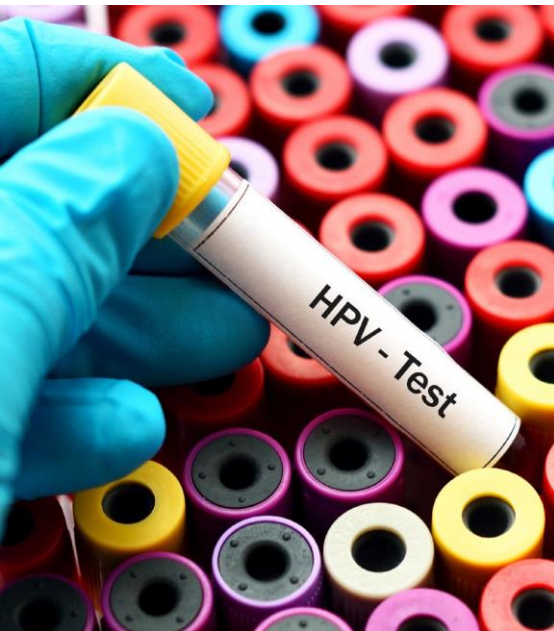
It is a virus of which there are more than 100 types: some are responsible for benign lesions; others are capable of producing preinvasive (dysplasia) and invasive lesions. Foremost among these, in terms of frequency and health impact, is cervical cancer, which is caused in almost all cases by HPV (*Human Papilloma Virus*) infection.

HOW IT IS TRANSMITTED (Come si trasmette)

HPV infection is by far the most common sexually transmitted infection: the absence of symptoms encourages its spread because most affected individuals are unaware of the ongoing infectious process. HPV infection is more frequent in the female population.

HOW IT IS DIAGNOSED (Come si diagnostica)

It is possible to identify a "dangerous" genital lesion early by regularly undergoing a smear test or cervico-vaginal cytological examination, a sampling of cells from the surface of the cervix and the cervical canal of the uterus, or the HPV-test, which involves sampling similar to the smear test.



Smear and HPV tests are simple, rapid, and painless examinations. Performed on a regular basis, according to the schedule provided in the screening programmes, they make it possible to identify dysplasias, remove them, and prevent tumour development.

HOW IS IT PREVENTED? (Come si previene)

The trump card in the battle against papillomavirus infection and associated diseases, primarily cervical cancer, is prevention.

Today we have available vaccines that are safe, well-tolerated and effective in preventing persistent infection by the HPV virus strains responsible for most cases of cervical cancer.

However, it should be emphasized that the use of the vaccine complements, but does not replace, screening with smears and HPV testing.

In fact, since the vaccine does not provide protection against all HPV types and, in any case, no vaccine can guarantee 100% protection, it is appropriate for all women to take part in screenings, even after vaccination.

CERVIX SCREENING IN THE VENETO REGION

(Lo screening della cervice uterine in Veneto)

WHAT IS IT? (Cos'è)

It is a prevention program that aims to reduce mortality from cervical cancer by allowing early detection and identification of particular lesions that have a high probability of evolving into cancer (precancerous lesions).

Who IS IT FOR? (A chi si rivolge)

All women who are resident in the Veneto Region from age 25 or 30, depending on vaccination status for Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination, and up to 64 years old.

Women vaccinated against HPV by age 15 have a very low risk of developing tumours or pretumor lesions, so they begin screening at age 30. Women not vaccinated against HPV by age 15, however, begin screening at age 25.

WHAT DOES IT CONSIST OF? (Cosa prevede)

The Uterine Cervix Screening Programme proposes, by invitation letter:

- smear test every three years to women aged 25 to 29 who are not vaccinated against HPV;
- HPV testing every 5 years to all women aged 30 to 64 years.

The most appropriate screening test is offered to each age group, based on test characteristics and on women's risk of developing cancer or pretumor lesions.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN HPV tests AND SMEAR TESTS

(Differenze tra test HPV e smear test)

The HPV test is a newly introduced test that looks for HPV infection, while the smear test looks for lesions caused by the infection itself. The HPV test is more sensitive than smear test and, for that reason, it can be performed every 5 years instead of 3. However, because in younger women HPV infections are very frequent and in most cases regress spontaneously, HPV testing is recommended from the age of 30.

The document was drafted by a multiprofessional team from the Operational Unit and the Public Relations Office

Updated April 2023