Human papillomavirus (HPV) and Oral Cancer Facts:

- HPV is the most common sexually transmitted virus and infection in the US.
- There are nearly 200 different strains of HPV, most of which are harmless and not cancer causing. Nine are known to cause cancers, and six are suspected of causing cancers. In oral cancers, we are primarily concerned with HPV number 16 which is also associated with cervical, anal, and penile cancers.
- HPV is the leading cause of oropharyngeal cancers (the very back of the mouth and part of the throat), and a very small number of front of the mouth oral cavity cancers. HPV16 is the strain most responsible and affects both males and females.
- You can have HPV without ever knowing it because the virus often produces no signs or symptoms that you will notice.
- Every day in the US, about 12,000 people ages 15 to 24 are infected with HPV. According to data from the ongoing NHANES study, approximately 26 million Americans on any given day have an oral HPV infection. Of those approximately 2600 are HPV16. The vast majority of individuals will clear the virus naturally through their own immune response, and never know that they were exposed or had it.
- The fastest growing segment of the oral and oropharyngeal cancer population are otherwise healthy, non-smokers in the 25-50 age range. HPV is driving the growth in numbers of oral cancers.
- White, non-smoking males age 35 to 55 are most at risk, 4 to 1 over females.
- In the oral/oropharyngeal environment, HPV16 manifests itself primarily in the posterior regions (the oropharynx) such as the base of the tongue, the back of the throat, the tonsils, the tonsillar crypts, and tonsillar pillars.
- HPV is passed on through genital contact, most often during vaginal, anal and oral sex.
- You are more likely to get HPV if you have many sex partners or a sex partner who has had many partners.
- The only way to know if you have an HPV infection is if your health care provider tests you for the virus.
- There is no cure for the virus. Most of the time, HPV goes away by itself within two years and does not cause health problems.
- Two vaccines known as Gardasil and Cervarix protect against the strains of HPV that cause cervical cancers (HPV16 and 18), Garadsil also protects against 2 versions that cause genital warts (HPV6 and 11). A new version of the Gardasil vaccine protects against 9 strains of HPV.
- The National Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices recommends routine HPV vaccination for girls ages 11 and 12, as well as girls and women ages 13 to 26 if they haven’t received the vaccine already. The Gardasil vaccine has also been approved for use in boys and men, 9 through 26 years old. These vaccines are most effective if given to children before they become sexually active. If you have already been exposed to HPV, the vaccines will not for work you.

References