
6. When did I get this infection ?

- We do not know the time from first oral HPV infection to cancer but it takes many years.
- We know that some people have infection 15 years or more before cancer.

7. What does having HPV in my tumor mean?

- Oropharyngeal cancer patients with HPV in their tumor live longer, on average, than people without HPV (i.e. HPV-positive tumors usually respond well to therapy).
- However, patients who currently smoke tobacco or have smoked for a long time in the past, do not live as long as patients who never smoked. Patients who are current smokers should consider quitting.

8. Will the HPV vaccine help me?

- The HPV vaccine prevents people from getting new HPV infections.
- The vaccine will not help you clear an infection you already have.
- The vaccine is recommended for people ages 9-26 years old.



9. Will my spouse / partner also get HPV-OPC ?

- The risk of HPV-OPC may be slightly higher among spouses of HPV-OPC but this cancer remains rare among spouses.
- There are no recommended screening tests for HPV-OPC.

For additional information

A comprehensive list of references is available in:

Fakhry C. and D'Souza G. Discussing the diagnosis of HPV-OSCC: Common questions and answers. Oral Oncology. 2013: XX-XX

Common questions & answers about HPV-positive oropharyngeal cancer (HPV-OPC)



A brochure for patients with HPV-positive oropharyngeal cancer and their families

1. What is Human Papillomavirus (HPV)?

- HPV is a sexually transmitted infection that can infect the oropharynx (tonsils and back of throat), anus, and genitals.
- There are many types of HPV. HPV can cause cancer, warts or have no effect.
- HPV is very common in the U.S. Over 20 million Americans have some type of genital or oral HPV infection.
- In some people, oral HPV infection leads to HPV-OPC after many years.



2. What causes oropharyngeal cancer?

- HPV now causes most oropharyngeal cancers in the U.S.
- It is recommended that oropharyngeal tumors be tested for HPV.
- Smoking and alcohol use can also cause oropharyngeal cancer.

3. How did I get an oral HPV infection?

- HPV is transmitted to your mouth by oral sex. It may also be possible to get oral HPV by other ways.
- Performing oral sex and having many oral sex partners can increase your chances of oral HPV infection.
- Having an oral HPV infection does not mean your partner was/is unfaithful and does not suggest promiscuity.
- Many people with HPV-OPC have only had a few oral sex partners in their life.

4. Who has oral HPV infection?

- Many people will likely be exposed to oral HPV in their life.
- Around 10% of men and 3.6% of women in the U.S. have HPV in their mouths and HPV infection is more commonly found with older age.
- Most people clear the infections on their own within a year or two, but in some people HPV infection persists.

5. Can I transmit oral HPV infection to others?

Family and Friends:

- Oral HPV is not casually transmitted by sharing drinks or kissing on the cheek.
- We do not know if open mouth kissing can transmit HPV.

Partners of people with HPV-OPC:

- You have already likely shared whatever infections you have.
- You do not need to change your sexual behavior.
- Female partners should have regular cervical Pap screening.

New sexual partners in the future:

- Many patients with HPV-OPC no longer have HPV detectable in their mouth after treatment, while others do.
- With new partners, discuss protection methods (e.g., condoms and barrier protection).