

My wife was recently diagnosed with HPV and she is pregnant. She has been told that all males have it and it is a genetic STD. She has also been told that a male transmits it to a female and that a female cannot transmit it to a male. Is this true?

HPV is perhaps the most common of STIs, with up to 80% of women estimated to have the virus by age 50 (the numbers for men are likely to be similar). Both males and females can transmit the virus to their partners, but women are more often diagnosed with an HPV-related cell changes (such as cervical cell changes detected with a PAP test). HPV is not a genetic or inherited condition, and genital HPV infections are acquired through sexual contact (vaginal, oral, and anal sex).

It can be months or even years after exposure before HPV (or a related condition) is diagnosed, making it difficult to answer the “when” and “from whom” questions that often arise. Sometimes pregnancy, which naturally suppresses a woman’s immune system, is the catalyst that causes a latent HPV infection to emerge. In these cases, any warts or cell changes often clear naturally after the baby is delivered.

By the way, HPV is almost never a problem during pregnancy, either for the mother or baby. Most women with HPV deliver naturally and have healthy children. You and your wife should ask her health care provider if either of you have any questions about this.

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