

Oral HPV infection, HPV-related cancers more common in men

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Oral HPV infection is more common among men than women, explaining why men are more prone than women to develop an HPV related head and neck cancer, according to a study presented at the Multidisciplinary Head and Neck Cancer Symposium.

Human papillomavirus, or HPV, has recently been linked to some types of [head and neck cancer](#) that are becoming more prominent in the United States, mostly among men. Patients infected with oral HPV type 16 have a 14 times greater risk of developing one of these cancers, which usually form on the tonsils and at the back of the tongue.

The correlation between HPV and [oral cancer](#) was only established in 2007, so it is not well understood how to detect or prevent these cancers.

Researchers sought to understand how prevalent oral HPV is in the U.S. and to understand the factors associated with infection. Data was collected from 5,579 men and women who participated in the National Health and [Nutrition Examination Survey](#) conducted by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention between 2009 and 2010. It was found that 7 percent of the U.S. population between ages 14 and 69 had an oral [HPV infection](#), with the infection being three times more common in men than women, 10.1 percent vs. 3.6 percent, respectively.

About 1 percent of the population had an HPV 16 infection, with it being five times more common in men than women, correlating with the higher incidence of HPV-related cancer in men than women.

Researchers do not yet know why the infection is more common in men than women in the first place.

"This study of oral HPV infection is the critical first step toward developing potential oropharyngeal [cancer prevention](#) strategies," Maura Gillison, MD, PhD, lead author of the study and the Jeg Coughlin Chair of Cancer Research at The Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio, said. "This is clearly important because HPV-positive oropharyngeal cancer is poised to overtake cervical cancer as the leading type of HPV-caused cancers in the U.S. And, we currently do not have another means by which to prevent or detect these cancers early."

More information: The abstract, "Prevalence of oral HPV infection in United States, 2009-2010," will be presented on Thursday, January 26, 2012.

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