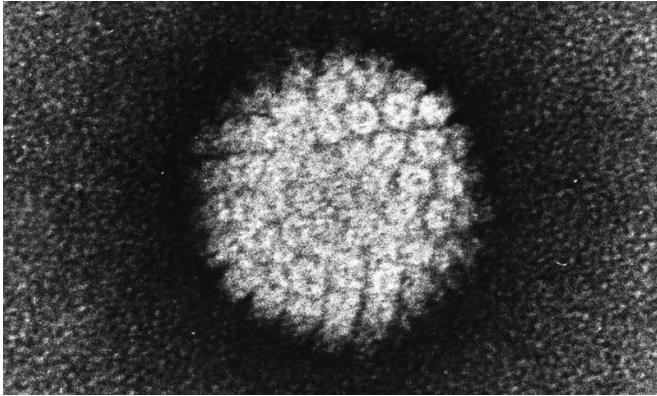


# Timing and intensity of oral sex may affect risk of oropharyngeal cancer

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Electron micrograph of a negatively stained human papilloma virus (HPV) which occurs in human warts. Credit: public domain

Human papillomavirus (HPV) can infect the mouth and throat to cause cancers of the oropharynx. A new study published early online in *Cancer*, a peer-reviewed journal of the American Cancer Society, has found that having more than 10 prior oral sex partners was associated with a 4.3-times greater likelihood of having HPV-related oropharyngeal cancer. The study also shows that having oral sex at a younger age and more partners in a shorter time period (oral sex intensity) were associated with higher likelihoods of having HPV-related cancer of the mouth and throat.

Previous studies have shown that performing [oral sex](#) is a strong risk factor for HPV-related oropharyngeal [cancer](#). To examine how behavior related to oral sex may affect risk, Virginia Drake, MD, of Johns Hopkins University, and her colleagues asked 163 individuals with and 345 without HPV-related oropharyngeal cancer to complete a behavioral survey.

In addition to timing and intensity of oral sex, individuals who had older sexual partners when

they were young, and those with partners who had [extramarital sex](#) were more likely to have HPV-related oropharyngeal cancer.

"Our study builds on previous research to demonstrate that it is not only the number of oral sexual partners, but also other factors not previously appreciated that contribute to the risk of exposure to HPV orally and subsequent HPV-related oropharyngeal cancer," said Dr. Drake. "As the incidence of HPV-related oropharyngeal cancer continues to rise in the United States, our study offers a contemporary evaluation of risk factors for this disease. We have uncovered additional nuances of how and why some people may develop this cancer, which may help identify those at greater risk."

**More information:** "Timing, number, and type of sexual partners associated with risk of oropharyngeal cancer." Virginia E. Drake, Carole Fakhry, Melina J. Windon, C. Matthew Stewart, Lee Akst, Alexander Hillel, Wade Chien, Patrick Ha, Brett Miles, Christine G. Gourin, Rajarsi Mandal, Wojciech K. Mydlarz, Lisa Rooper, Tanya Troy, Siddhartha Yavvari, Tim Waterboer Nicole Brenner, David W. Eisele, and Gypsyamber D'Souza. *Cancer*, Published Online: January 11, 2021. [DOI: 10.1002/cncr.33346](https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.33346)

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