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[Spouses of Patients with HPV-positive Oropharyngeal Cancer Do Not Have a Higher Risk of Oral HPV Infections](#)

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In a new study, researchers found that spouses of patients with human papilloma virus (HPV)-related oropharyngeal cancer were not more likely to have an HPV infection than the general population. Oropharyngeal cancer begins in the oropharynx, which is the middle part of the throat behind the mouth, and includes the base of the tongue, the soft palate, the side and back walls of the throat and the tonsils. HPV infection is very common among men and women in the United States and is a risk factor for several types of cancer, including oropharyngeal cancer. However, most people with an HPV infection will not get cancer. When a cancer contains signs of HPV, it is called HPV-positive.

The study included 147 patients with cancer and 83 spouses or partners. To find evidence of HPV when the patients were first diagnosed, the participants used a 30-second mouth rinse and gargle, which was spit out and analyzed for signs of HPV. This test was repeated a year later. Signs of HPV were found in 66% of the patients with cancer when they were diagnosed, and 7% still had signs of HPV a year later after receiving cancer treatment. Overall, a little more than 7% of the partners had signs of oral HPV. However, among the 75 partners who were women, 5% had signs of HPV, which is similar to the 4% of women in the general population that have signs of HPV. Among partners who were men, the percentage of those with signs of HPV was also similar to that of the general population of men; however, it was higher than for partners who

were women.

In addition, researchers found no cancers or precancers (abnormal cells that are not cancer but could become cancer over time) in 64% of the partners who had an examination to look for oral cancer.

What this means for patients

“Patients with HPV-positive oropharyngeal cancers and their spouses often worry about oral HPV transmission and wonder about the spouses’ cancer risk. These findings provide assurance that a partner’s risk of HPV-related oropharyngeal cancer remains low. Couples who have been together for several years have likely already shared whatever infections they have and no changes in their physical intimacy are needed,” said lead study author Gypsyamber D’Souza, PhD, MPH, MS, Associate Professor of Epidemiology at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland.

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What is my risk of HPV?
- Should I be tested for an oral HPV infection?
- What is my risk of developing an HPV-related cancer?
- How can I reduce my risk of an HPV infection?

For More Information

[Guide to Oral and Oropharyngeal Cancer](#) [2]

[HPV and Cancer](#) [3]

Links

[1] <http://www.cancer.net/spouses-patients-hpv-positive-oropharyngeal-cancer-do-not-have-higher-risk-oral-hpv-infections>

[2] <http://www.cancer.net/node/19453>

[3] <http://www.cancer.net/node/24561>