

Counselling Patients on an HrHPV Positive Result

HrHPV Positive: What Does It Mean for Your Patient?

Understanding the Result

When discussing a positive high-risk HPV (HrHPV) result with your patient, it's important to reassure them that a positive result does not mean they have or will definitely develop cancer. Rather, it indicates the presence of a virus that has the potential to cause cervical cell changes over time.

It's crucial to inform patients that they will be closely monitored through the **National Cervical Screening Programme (NCSP)**. If any abnormal cells are identified during colposcopy, appropriate treatment can be administered long before these changes might progress to cancer. Treatment is generally only required if there are particular abnormal cell changes.

What Does This Mean for Their Sexual History and Future?

Many patients may feel anxious about how they contracted HPV and what it means for their sexual relationships. Explain that **HPV is extremely common**—most people will contract it at some point in their lives. Patients should know that having HPV is not a reflection of their sexual behaviour, and it is almost impossible to determine when or from whom they contracted it.

The **HPV vaccine** offers protection against the most common high-risk and low-risk HPV types, but it does not cover all types. Therefore, even vaccinated individuals can still test positive for HrHPV. It's also important to explain that the virus can persist for years without causing any problems.

Reassure your patients that they do not need to change their sexual practices or partners. Although they may wish to inform their partner, there is no requirement to disclose their HrHPV status to past or future partners.

What Should Male Partners Do?

Currently, there are no screening tests for high-risk HPV in men. Clinicians can reassure patients that their male partners do not need to take any specific action in response to an HrHPV positive result. HPV often clears on its own, and there are no screening methods for detecting it in males.

Key Takeaway Points for Patients

- **Prevention:** Most cervical cancers can be prevented with HPV vaccination and regular cervical screening. Following up with care ensures that any abnormalities can be treated early.
- **Fertility:** There is no evidence to suggest that HPV affects fertility.
- **Smoking:** Smoking can weaken the immune system's ability to clear the HPV infection, increasing the risk of abnormal cell changes. Encourage patients to stop smoking to support their immune health.

This approach to counselling helps provide clarity, reassurance, and actionable guidance for patients with an HrHPV positive result.