

Who can get Anal Cancer?

Anyone can get anal cancer, but it is much more common for people who are HIV-positive than HIV-negative.

People at increased risk for anal cancer may have the following risk factors:

- HIV/AIDS infection and others with reduced immune systems
- History of anal warts
- Cervical or vulvar dysplasia
- Abnormal Cervical Pap
- Those with many sexual partners
- Having anal sex (people who have never had anal sex can still get anal cancer)
- Cigarette smoking



Get Screened Now:



Anal Cancer Prevention Program

Early diagnosis and prevention have a major role in the management of anal cancer and its precursor lesions, known as anal dysplasia.

What is Anal Cancer?

It is a malignant tumor which arises from the anus, the distal opening of the gastrointestinal tract. It is a distinct entity from the more common colorectal cancer. Anal cancer is typically a slow growth tumor, normally linked to human papillomavirus (HPV) infection. The progression from anal dysplasia to anal cancer is slow, this long interval **allows for diagnosis and possible treatment** of the lesions while they are still in a precancerous stage.

What causes Anal Cancer?

About 90% of anal cancers are caused by the Human Papillomavirus or HPV. There are many strains or types of HPV and not all of them cause cancer. Most cancers of the cervix and anus are caused by HPV strains 16 and 18. Other HPV strains cause genital warts. HPV is the most common sexually transmitted disease and most people are exposed to HPV over their lifetime. About 75-80% of sexually active people have been infected with HPV. Genital HPV is spread through contact with (touching) the skin of someone who has an HPV infection. Contact includes vaginal, anal, and oral sex. In many cases, HPV causes no symptoms. Most often, the HPV virus clears, but sometimes the virus remains hidden and reactivates later in life. HPV infection can cause changes to the cells inside the anus called "dysplasia". Over time, some of these HPV-damaged cells (which are called "High-Grade Squamous Intraepithelial Lesions" or HSIL) can develop into cancer. HSIL is not the same as cancer, but it is a warning sign that cancer may one day develop in that spot. It isn't known why some HSIL go away on their own while others get worse and develop into cancer.

What is HPV?

HPV is the commonest sexually transmitted disease, with 14 million new diagnosis/year in US.

It is A **DNA Viral Family with more than 150 known genotypes/strains**, some of which are at High Risk for cancer (16,18, 31)

What are the signs of Anal Cancer?

The **early stages of anal cancer usually have no symptoms** which means most people are unaware when they begin to develop cancer. **In the later stages, the most common symptom reported is pain or pressure**, which can be felt constantly or when having bowel movements or when having sex. Lumps, swelling, itching, bleeding or unusual discharge can also be symptoms of anal cancer. Anal cancer is often misdiagnosed as a hemorrhoid. **If you are having any of these symptoms, it's important to tell your doctor.**

How do I get screened?

Screening involves visual inspection, but that alone can fail to detect subtle changes inside the anal canal. Additional methods are needed for diagnosing anal dysplasia. These include:

Anal Pap Smear

Cells are collected using a swab inserted into the anus. Those cells are sent to pathology to look for precancerous or dysplastic cells. HPV testing may be done on the same swab. If the result is normal, repeat in 1-2 years. If abnormal, then an HRA should be performed.

Digital ano-rectal exams or 'DARE'

A doctor places his or her finger inside the anal canal to feel for abnormalities. The purpose of this test is to look for abnormal masses or growths, so if you think you may have precancer, request this additional testing.

Anoscopy

A tube called an anoscope is placed inside the anus and a strong light illuminates the tissue.

High Resolution Anoscopy (HRA)

A magnifying digital camera, connected to a scope is used to provide **more detailed and magnified views of the anus**. If an abnormal area is seen, then a very small piece of anal tissue may be removed (biopsy) and sent to a specialist (pathologist) to check for signs of cancer. **The procedure takes about 15 minutes. Precancerous areas can be treated in the office.**

