

sextalk.

answers to your questions about sex and relationships

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Q. I had unprotected sex with my recent boyfriend. Although I’m on the pill I didn’t think to use a condom (I know that’s stupid). After that, I talked to one of my friends about it and she told me that my boyfriend had sex with another girl about a year ago and she had HPV. I want to get tested for it but do I need to wait or will it show up right away? Is there a place close by that I can get tested at? I’m just scared because I feel like this is going to change my life.

A. Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), which may cause genital warts, is actually a group of over 100 viral strains or types. As many as 50 - 80% of sexually active men and women become infected with some type of HPV throughout their lives.

As you suggest, some types of HPV can be spread through unprotected sex, but it is difficult to tell whether or not you were infected without the presence of genital warts or an “abnormal” result from a Pap exam. On the other hand, the absence of genital warts does not necessarily mean you were not infected, since warts may take weeks, months, or even years to develop, if they develop at all.

In reality, most people who have HPV are not even aware that they are infected since they show no visible signs of the virus – this may be the case with your boyfriend. And while there is no cure for HPV, warts can be removed if they are present.

Out of the hundred or so strains of the virus, about 15 have been linked to certain types of cancer, including cervical cancer. Having an annual Pap exam is the best way to catch any problems early since cervical cancer is highly treatable and preventable.

You can get your annual Pap exam right here on campus at the Women’s Health Clinic in the Campus Health Service. Call 621-9202 to schedule an appointment. For more information on HPV check out www.ashastd.org/

Have a question? Send it to sextalk@email.arizona.edu

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