



# Vulval Cancer

On average, women are diagnosed with vulval cancer at age

65 to 74<sup>1</sup>

## Symptoms

### Bleeding

- Bleeding in between periods
- Bleeding after sex
- Bleeding after menopause

### Skin changes

- Thickened skin
- Changes to skin colour
- Lump or growth in or on either side of the opening to the vagina
- Wart like bumps or ulcers

### Pain and discomfort

- Itching, burning or tingling sensation that doesn't go away
- Pain during urination
- Pain during sex

## Importance of HPV

Vulval cancer is very closely linked with human papillomavirus (HPV) infection. HPV is a group of infections made up of over one-hundred different viral strains. Some strains are more commonly associated with cold sores or genital warts while others have been found to increase your risk of cancer. All forms of HPV are spread through sexual contact and studies estimate that over 75% of sexually active adults will develop at least one HPV infection during their lifetime.<sup>2</sup>

The best way to mitigate your risk of HPV infection is to get vaccinated. HPV vaccines are offered to all school-aged children across Canada although many adults will be eligible for vaccination if requested.

## What is vulval cancer?

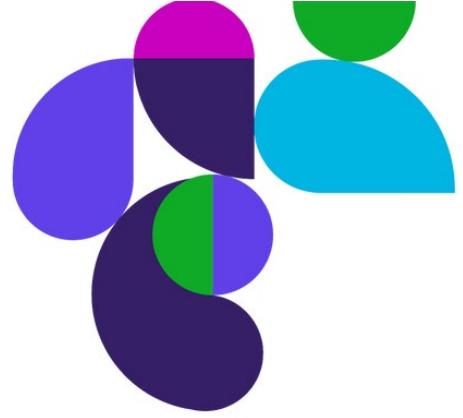
Vulval cancer occurs when the cells that make up the vulva undergo a malignant change.

The vulva is another name for a woman's external genitalia. Sometimes referred to as the 'gatekeeper to your vagina', the vulva plays an important role in protecting the internal reproductive organs.

The cells that make up the vulva are constantly turning over, just like other skin cells elsewhere on your body. The dynamic nature of vulval cells increases their risk of malignant changes. It is very common for vulval cells to undergo abnormal changes, most often these are non-cancerous (benign) and resolve with topical creams or minimally invasive surgery.

Sometimes the vulval cells undergo more severe changes that are associated with a higher risk of cancer development. In these cases, the abnormal vulval cells are aptly labelled 'pre-cancerous'. If left untreated, these pre-cancerous cells can undergo a 'malignant transformation' and further progress into cancer.

**HPV16 and HPV18 are the most common high-risk strains, accounting for 40% of vulval cancer cases.<sup>2</sup>**



## Diagnosis

If your doctor is concerned about the possibility of vulval cancer based on your symptoms and physical exam, they will likely refer you for further testing to confirm the diagnosis.

Initial testing for vulval cancer includes colposcopy, a camera test similar to an endoscopy that helps visualize inside the vaginal canal, and biopsy of the affected tissue.

## How can Teladoc Health help?

If you have been diagnosed with vulval cancer and would like a second opinion on treatment options, our [Expert Medical Opinion](#) service can locate a specialist to review your case.

Our [Mental Health Navigator](#) services can help you find mental health resources in your community to support you through your cancer journey. Mental Health Navigator assessments can also support individuals who are looking to address any secondary mental health symptoms alongside their cancer journey.

This guide is not meant to provide medical advice or service and should not be construed as the professional advice of Teladoc Health. As such, Teladoc Health does not guarantee or assume responsibility for the correctness of the information or its applicability regarding any specific factual situation. Personal health problems should be brought to the attention of physicians and appropriate health care professionals.

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1. "Vulvar Cancer." The Society of Gynecologic Oncology of Canada, The Society of Gynecologic Oncology of Canada, [gyneoncology.ca/gynecologic-cancers/vulvar-cancer/](http://gyneoncology.ca/gynecologic-cancers/vulvar-cancer/). Accessed 4 Jan. 2024.
2. Canadian Cancer Society / Société canadienne du cancer. "Human Papillomavirus." Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Cancer Society, [cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/reduce-your-risk/get-vaccinated/human-papillomavirus-hpv](http://cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/reduce-your-risk/get-vaccinated/human-papillomavirus-hpv). Accessed 4 Jan. 2024.
3. "Vulvar Cancer." Canadian Cancer Society, Canadian Cancer Society / Société canadienne du cancer, [cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/cancer-types/vulvar](http://cancer.ca/en/cancer-information/cancer-types/vulvar). Accessed 4 Jan. 2024.

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