

The Prevalence of Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and its Impact on Cervical Dysplasia in the Northwest Territories

About HPV

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is a very common sexually transmitted infection that may cause genital warts and in rare instances, lead to cervical cancer in women. During normally administered Pap tests, samples can also be tested for the presence of HPV. A Pap test is a great tool to reduce a woman's risk of developing cervical cancer and involves collecting cells from a woman's cervix and looking through a microscope to make sure that the cells are normal and healthy. A positive HPV test only means that you have HPV in your cervix and it does not mean that you have or will develop cervical cancer or genital warts.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this International Polar Year study was to find out the prevalence of the HPV infections in NWT women. The investigators also wanted to understand whether there are some life habits that increase the chance of acquiring the infection. NWT public health professionals will use this information to develop effective cancer screening and prevention programs for women in the North.

The study was designed and developed by a committee that consisted of local researchers, community members, and Aboriginal organization representatives.

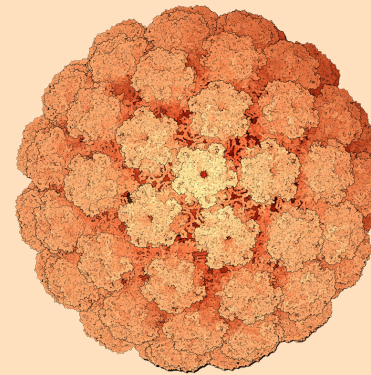
Data Collection

The study took place between April 2008 and March 2010. Over 6,000 Pap test samples were collected and tested from NWT women aged 14-84. Some women were also asked to complete a short questionnaire during their regular Pap test visits. Health professionals collected over 1280 questionnaires. The study was conducted in 19 health clinics that included 15 communities across the NWT.

Results

The first results of this study tell us that:

- ✦ About 24% of women in the NWT have an HPV infection, which is similar to other areas in Canada.
- ✦ A considerable number of young women under the age of 20 are sexually active and get Pap smears — 10% of the sample were in women aged 14-19.
- ✦ Because women and men do not know when they are infected, initial HPV infection happens early — 50% of Pap smears from women aged 14-19 showed HPV infection.
- ✦ Most HPV infections clear on their own, but some cause cervical abnormalities that can lead to cervical cancer.

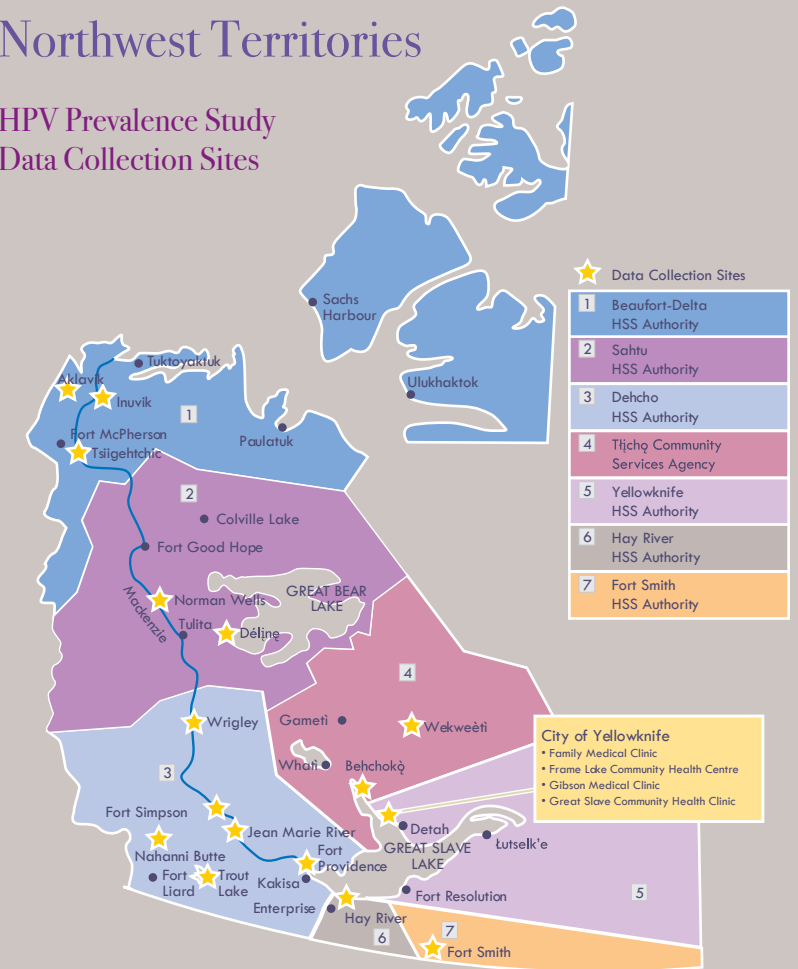


The Human Papillomavirus

Note that data analysis is not yet completed and communities will be updated when the results are released.

Northwest Territories

HPV Prevalence Study Data Collection Sites



Project Team

Dr. Yang Mao (P.I., Public Health Agency of Canada), Dr. Paul Brassard (co-P.I., McGill University), Candice Lys (Project Coordinator, Institute for Circumpolar Health Research), Government of the Northwest Territories Department of Health and Social Services, HPV Steering Committee

Acknowledgements

A special thanks to all nurses, nurse practitioners, midwives, physicians, and staff for their active participation in this study. Also, thank you to the study steering committee members for your time and expertise.

