



Cape Town, South Africa, 4th March 2017

4th of March – International HPV awareness Day

Human papillomaviruses (HPVs) are sexually transmitted viruses that are very common worldwide. There are more than 200 different HPV types, some of which are known to cause certain cancers such as cervical, anal and oropharyngeal cancer. Other types are responsible for genital warts. Most sexually active men and women will acquire at least one genital HPV type at some point in their lifetime. HPV can be spread by sexual contact.

Worldwide, cervical cancer is the fourth most frequent cancer in women and an estimated 270'000 women die of cervical cancer every year, with 85% of cases occurring in less developed regions of the world. In developed countries there are several approaches to prevention of HPV-related cancers. One approach is HPV vaccination, to prevent initial infection with HPV. Another is aimed at individuals who may already have been exposed to HPV, such as cervical Pap smear screening. The goal of these Pap smear screening programs is to detect HPV-related pre-cancerous lesions and remove them before they progress to cancer. In developing countries there is limited access to both of these prevention approaches. Cancer is often diagnosed at an advanced stage, and prospects for treatment may be poor, resulting in a higher rate of death from cervical cancer in these countries. Also men are affected from cancer caused by HPV. For men who have sex with men, the risk of getting anal cancer is comparable to cervical cancer for women.

The International Papillomavirus Society (IPVS) is declaring March 4th as "International HPV Awareness Day" to promote awareness of and education around HPV infection, how it spreads, and how HPV infection and the diseases that it causes can be prevented.