

HUMAN PAPILLOMA VIRUS (HPV)

# Heather Banks

How HPV Changed My Life



I live in Indianapolis. I am a mom, a wife, a teacher, and a cervical cancer survivor. I first found out that I had HPV when I was 31 years old and was just 6 weeks pregnant with my second child. No invasive procedures were needed at that time; however, after my son was born and the HPV cells were still present, additional steps were necessary. In order to try and get rid of the abnormal cells, I had a biopsy as well as a LEEP (Loop electrosurgical excision procedure). The results of the LEEP came back showing that I had Stage 3 cervical cancer. Even though I had no risk factors for HPV or cervical cancer, my story proves that HPV and cervical cancer “can happen to anyone.” My treatment included a hysterectomy followed by radiation and chemotherapy. I have been cancer free for 5 years and I advocate for HPV awareness, vaccination, and early screening and testing.

Heather is one of 79 million persons in the US infected with HPV. HPV is the most common sexually transmitted infection, and transmission most commonly occurs in teens and young adults. Most people do not have symptoms or complications from HPV infection, and they are able to rid the virus on their own; however, persistent infection with high-risk HPV types can be dangerous. HPV causes most of the cases of cervical cancer in women and most of the anal, penile and oropharyngeal cancers in males. In addition, most cases of genital warts are caused by HPV.

There is no cure for HPV infection, although the infection usually goes away on its own. It is possible for the virus to remain in a “sleeping” or dormant state and be reactivated years later.

Fortunately, there is a safe and effective vaccine that protects against the most problematic types of HPV. The vaccine is most effective when given before the onset of sexual activity; therefore it is recommended for all boys and girls at age 11 or 12, and can be given alongside the other adolescent vaccines that are required for school. The vaccine can be given up to age 26.

**The HPV vaccine is a cancer-prevention vaccine. Please ask your doctor about the HPV vaccine and protect yourself and your children from HPV associated cancers.**

**For more information, please visit [www.vaccinateindiana.org](http://www.vaccinateindiana.org)**

