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## HPV studies in sexual couples: prevalence, pathology and intervention

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## Preface

Human papillomavirus infection is a necessary cause of cervical cancer.<sup>1</sup> This title of a publication of the late prof. Jan Walboomers is quoted in almost all publications on HPV and cervical carcinoma in the last 5 years and emphasises the basic importance of his work and of his colleagues. The title was based on the fact that HPV DNA was detectable in over 99% of cervical carcinomas. Cervical cancer in women is a rare complication of an infection with a high-risk type HPV (hr-HPV). The large majority of these infections are cleared within a limited period of time (8-14 months). Human papillomavirus is mainly acquired through sexual activity, the life-time risk of an infection being >80% for the whole population, both males and females.<sup>2</sup>

In men hr-HPV can be found in about 40% of penile carcinomas. Furthermore, HPV is highly prevalent in penile samples of male sexual partners of women with HPV-induced cervical intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN) lesions.

Despite the fact that HPV infections are known to be sexually transmitted studies in sexual couples are rare. Moreover, it is unclear whether HPV infections in men are, as in women, associated with the clinical appearance of specific flat lesions on the penis.

This thesis describes the longitudinal results of HPV infections in a cohort of sexual couples consisting of women with cervical intraepithelial neoplasia (CIN) as index patient and their male partner. More in detail, the relationship between HPV and the prevalence of penile lesions on one hand, between viral load and the presence of penile lesions in men and CIN in women on the other hand, and the effect of condom use on the regression of penile and cervical lesions was studied.