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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Human Papillomavirus and students in Brazil: an assessment of knowledge of a common infection – preliminary report[☆]



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KEYWORDS

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Abstract

Introduction: Human Papillomavirus (HPV) infection is the most prevalent sexually transmitted disease worldwide. One of the barriers to the implementation of prevention programs against the disease is the limited knowledge possessed by most populations regarding the virus and its possible consequences.

Objective: The purpose of this study was to evaluate the knowledge of Brazilian college students on transmission, clinical manifestations, and diseases correlated with HPV, highlighting the poor knowledge of a very common infection.

Methods: A total of 194 students answered a questionnaire about transmission, clinical features and the possible consequences of persistent HPV infection. The questionnaire was self-applied under the supervision of the authors.

Results: The clinical manifestations of HPV infection were not clear to most students. Incorrect assumptions of the clinical manifestations of HPV infection included: bleeding (25%), pain (37%) and rashes (22%). Twelve per cent of respondents did not recognize warts as an HPV-related disease. Regarding potential consequences of persistent infection, students did not recognize a relationship between HPV and laryngeal carcinoma (80.9%), pharyngeal carcinoma (78.9%), anal carcinoma (73.2%), vulvar carcinoma (65.4%) and vaginal carcinoma (54.6%). Large portions of the population evaluated were unaware of modes of HPV transmission beyond genital contact.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Brasil;
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Conclusion: Knowledge of HPV by the population evaluated in this study is partial and fragmented. Lack of knowledge may contribute to the further spread of the disease. Public health policies for education and guidance of the population should be implemented in Brazil.

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HPV e estudantes no Brasil: avaliação do conhecimento de uma infecção comum—relato preliminar

Resumo

Introdução: A infecção pelo papilomavírus humano (HPV) é a doença sexualmente transmissível mais prevalente em todo o mundo. Uma das barreiras para a implementação de programas de prevenção contra a doença é o conhecimento limitado da maioria das populações sobre o vírus e suas possíveis consequências.

Objetivo: O objetivo deste estudo foi avaliar o conhecimento dos estudantes universitários brasileiros sobre a transmissão, manifestações clínicas e doenças correlacionadas com o HPV, com destaque para o pouco conhecimento de uma infecção muito comum.

Método: Um total de 194 estudantes respondeu a um questionário sobre a transmissão, características clínicas e as possíveis consequências da infecção persistente pelo HPV. O questionário foi autoaplicado, sob a supervisão dos autores.

Resultados: As manifestações clínicas da infecção pelo HPV não eram claras para a maioria dos estudantes. As suposições incorretas das manifestações clínicas da infecção pelo HPV incluíam: hemorragia (25%), dor (37%) e erupções cutâneas (22%) — 12% dos entrevistados não reconheciam as verrugas como uma doença relacionada ao HPV. Quanto às potenciais consequências da infecção persistente, os alunos não reconheciam uma relação entre HPV e câncer de laringe (80,9%), carcinoma da faringe (78,9%), carcinoma anal (73,2%), carcinoma vulvar (65,4%) e carcinoma vaginal (54,6%). Grandes porções da população avaliada desconheciam os modos de transmissão do HPV além do contato genital.

Conclusão: O conhecimento de HPV pela população avaliada neste estudo é parcial e fragmentado. A falta de conhecimento pode contribuir para a propagação da doença. Políticas públicas de saúde para a educação e orientação da população devem ser implementadas no Brasil.

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Introduction

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) is the etiological agent of the most common viral infection of the genital tract worldwide. The virus is also related to a wide range of disorders in children and adults of both genders. The clinical impact of HPV-related disease encompasses a range of benign and malignant disorders.¹

HPV infection is the most prevalent sexually transmitted disease worldwide, with over 14 million new cases reported in the United States in 2008. Taking into account all infected individuals, it is estimated that about 79 million Americans were infected with HPV in 2008.²

The human papillomavirus is a DNA virus of the *Papillomaviridae* family. HPV infects skin and mucosa. Based on differences in the genomic sequence of L1, the gene encoding the major capsid protein, more than 190 types of HPV have been identified by molecular analysis.³

HPV is classified into high- and low-risk types according to their potential to induce cancer in infected tissues.¹ Although sexual contact is the most widely accepted

mode of transmission, other forms of contamination are described in the literature.⁴ Vertical transmission (infection of infants by passage through a contaminated birth canal) is 231 times higher in women with vaginal/vulvar condyloma than in women without clinically evident disease. Transmission of HPV through subclinical infection may also be an important mode of infection, perhaps the highest risk factor when studying maternal-fetal transmission rate.⁵

The clinical manifestations of HPV-related diseases vary depending upon the HPV type and the site of inoculation, but the wart is considered the classic primary lesion of infection.⁶

While persistent infection in the cervix by high-risk HPV (16 and 18) has long been considered the causative factor in cervical and uterine cancer, it has been only recently recognized that this same process accounts for cancer of the anus, penis, vagina, vulva and oropharynx.^{7,8}

HPV infection with serotypes 6 and 11 (low-risk) causes diseases such as recurrent laryngeal and oral papillomatosis.⁹

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