

# Human Papilloma Virus in Portugal: Biomedical Sciences students' knowledge and perceptions

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## Introduction

Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) is responsible for a high number of infections in the sexually active population, especially in individuals between 16 and 25 years old and in the first years after sexual initiation.

It is proven the association of this infection with malignant tumors, particularly Cervical Cancer. The relationship of HPV and other malignancies, such as penis and oropharynx cancer, has gained importance in recent decades. HPV is therefore a major health problem that affects both women and men.

It is important to understand the knowledge of undergraduate health students since they will be future professionals who will play an important role in HPV prevention, diagnosis and treatment.

The main goal of this study is to verify the level of HPV knowledge and awareness among undergraduate students of Biomedical Sciences in Portugal.

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## Methods

To assess student's knowledge about HPV screening and diagnostic methods and vaccination, a 34 questions questionnaire was developed concerning Sociodemographic data; Sexual Behavior; HPV awareness and knowledge; Screening, Diagnosis and Vaccination knowledge; which was circulated countrywide to program coordinators and made available online between April and May 2018. A total of 111 questionnaires was obtained, with most of the participants being girls (92.24%) and 21 years old the most frequent age (23.28%).

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## Results

All respondents stated that they had heard about HPV and all indicated Cervical Cancer as the most important consequence of HPV infection. Most individuals specified that higher education institutions were the main source of their HPV knowledge (93.1%). When questioned about the association of HPV with different diseases, only 14.66% of individuals selected wrong answers. Considering HPV prevention, 52.24% selected wrongly "Use of oral contraceptives". Most participants were correct about HPV transmission and risk behaviours. However, 55.78% answered incorrectly concerning HPV symptoms. Knowledge about vaccination showed only 11.08% wrong answers.

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## Discussion and Conclusions

In general, satisfactory knowledge about HPV was observed, with most individuals achieving final scores between 51% and 75%. We can conclude that the general knowledge is acceptable. However, there is still wrong information and some lack of knowledge, mostly about prevention and symptoms.

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## Take-home Messages

Portuguese Biomedical Sciences students have satisfactory levels of knowledge about HPV. It is important to strengthen matters concerning HPV prevention and symptoms.

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