

Patient information factsheet

Laryngeal papilloma

We have given you this factsheet because you have been diagnosed with a condition called laryngeal papilloma. It explains what laryngeal papilloma is, how it can affect you and what the available treatment options are. We hope it helps to answer some of the questions you may have. If you have any further questions or concerns, please contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet.

What is laryngeal papilloma?

Laryngeal papilloma is a condition where benign (non-cancerous), wart-like growths, called 'papillomas', develop in the larynx (voice box). Although these growths usually appear in the larynx, they can sometimes extend into the trachea (windpipe).

If you repeatedly develop laryngeal papillomas, this is known as 'recurrent respiratory papillomatosis' (RRP) or 'laryngeal papillomatosis'.

What causes laryngeal papilloma?

Laryngeal papilloma is caused by a very common virus known as the human papillomavirus (HPV). While most people are exposed to HPV, only a small number of people go on to develop laryngeal papilloma.

Current evidence suggests that laryngeal papilloma may also have a hormonal influence, as the condition can sometimes improve during hormonal changes, such as:

- puberty (when a child begins to grow and develop into an adult)
- pregnancy
- menopause (when periods stop due to lower hormone levels)

What are the symptoms?

Laryngeal papilloma can cause a variety of symptoms, which mainly affect the voice and breathing.

Healthy voice production depends on your vocal cords moving together and vibrating. Laryngeal papillomas disrupt this movement, causing:

- hoarseness
- a strained or breathy voice
- difficulty speaking loudly or clearly

If you unintentionally strain your voice further to compensate, this can make your symptoms worse.

In advanced cases of laryngeal papilloma, the growths can obstruct the windpipe, causing breathing difficulties. Although it is rare for this to happen quickly, it is important that you seek urgent medical attention by attending your local emergency department if you experience significant difficulty in breathing.

The condition can also impact other aspects of your life:

- **Emotional wellbeing**

Voice difficulties can cause:

- feelings of frustration and anxiety
- social withdrawal (when a person retreats from interacting with people and/or going to social events or activities)

If you think you would benefit from some additional support or counselling, please speak to your general practitioner (GP).

- **Professional or social life**

Laryngeal papilloma can affect your work and social life, especially if you rely heavily on your voice for communication. If you have any concerns about this, please discuss these with your healthcare team at your outpatient appointment. Your healthcare team can provide advice and support, and they can also arrange any necessary referrals to other specialist teams for you.

How is laryngeal papilloma diagnosed?

Your doctor will have referred you to an ear, nose and throat (ENT) specialist for diagnosis.

Diagnosis of laryngeal papilloma involves having a procedure called a laryngoscopy to examine your larynx and vocal cords. During the procedure, an ENT specialist will insert a small, flexible tube with a light and video camera at one end (called an endoscope) through your mouth and down the back of your throat. The procedure may be under local anaesthetic (medicine that numbs a specific area of the body) or general anaesthetic (medicine that sends you to sleep). Your ENT specialist will have discussed this with you in more detail before your procedure.

How is laryngeal papilloma treated?

Your treatment and follow-up care will be managed by an ENT specialist.

Treatment can include:

- **Surgery**

The main treatment for laryngeal papilloma involves having a surgical procedure under general anaesthetic to remove the growths. The procedure is usually performed as a day-case procedure, which means that you can go home on the same day as the procedure and do not have to stay in hospital overnight.

Most people's voices usually improve shortly after the procedure. However, it is important to note that although the procedure helps to improve symptoms, it does not cure the condition. Laryngeal papillomas often grow back after they have been removed, so it is likely that you will need to have this procedure repeated in the future.

- **Speech and language therapy (SLT)**

We recommend you have voice therapy from a speech and language therapist (a healthcare professional who provides specialist support to help people of all ages with communication and/or swallowing difficulties) after your surgery. This will help to promote healing and prevent further strain on your voice.

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A speech and language therapist can provide guidance on:

- vocal hygiene (healthy habits to take care of your voice)
- posture
- how to use your voice safely

We will arrange any necessary SLT appointments for you.

Will the condition improve over time?

For some people, laryngeal papilloma may reduce in frequency or severity over time. However, other people may find that they need ongoing management with regular surgeries and voice therapy.

Can the condition become cancerous?

Laryngeal papillomas are **non-cancerous**. The risk of these growths turning cancerous is very low. However, it is important that you attend all your regular monitoring and follow-up appointments so that any issues can be caught and treated as soon as possible. We will arrange any necessary monitoring and follow-up appointments for you.

Monitoring for laryngeal papilloma involves having a procedure called a flexible nasoendoscopy. During this procedure, a small, flexible tube with a light and video camera at one end (endoscope) is inserted into one of your nostrils and passed down the back of your throat to examine your larynx. It is usually performed without any kind of anaesthetic. However, if you find the procedure uncomfortable, please let the ENT specialist performing the procedure know and they can use some local anaesthetic spray to numb your throat.

When should I seek medical help?

Contact us using the details at the end of this factsheet if you notice any of the following symptoms:

- any changes in your voice
- noisy breathing or a high-pitched, wheezing sound when you inhale (known as 'stridor')

How can I help protect myself?

Vaccinations

Although the evidence is not very strong, the British Laryngological Association (BLA) recommends having the HPV vaccination as it may help your immune system fight HPV. The HPV vaccine helps protect against the strains of HPV most often linked to laryngeal papilloma. It is currently offered as part of routine immunisation for children, but it can also benefit adults who have not yet been vaccinated. Speak with your GP about whether the HPV vaccination is appropriate for you and/or your family members.

Contact us

If you have any further questions or concerns or you need to re-arrange one of your ENT appointments, please contact us.

Ear, nose and throat (ENT) secretary

Telephone: **023 8120 2928** (Monday to Friday, 8am to 4pm)

If we are unable to answer your call, please leave a voicemail with your name, hospital number and a brief reason for your call. We will aim to get back to you as soon as we can.

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Useful links

ENT UK

www.entuk.org

Recurrent Respiratory Papillomatosis Foundation (RRPF)

<https://rrpf.org>

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For help preparing for your visit, arranging an interpreter or accessing the hospital, please visit **www.uhs.nhs.uk/additionalsupport**

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