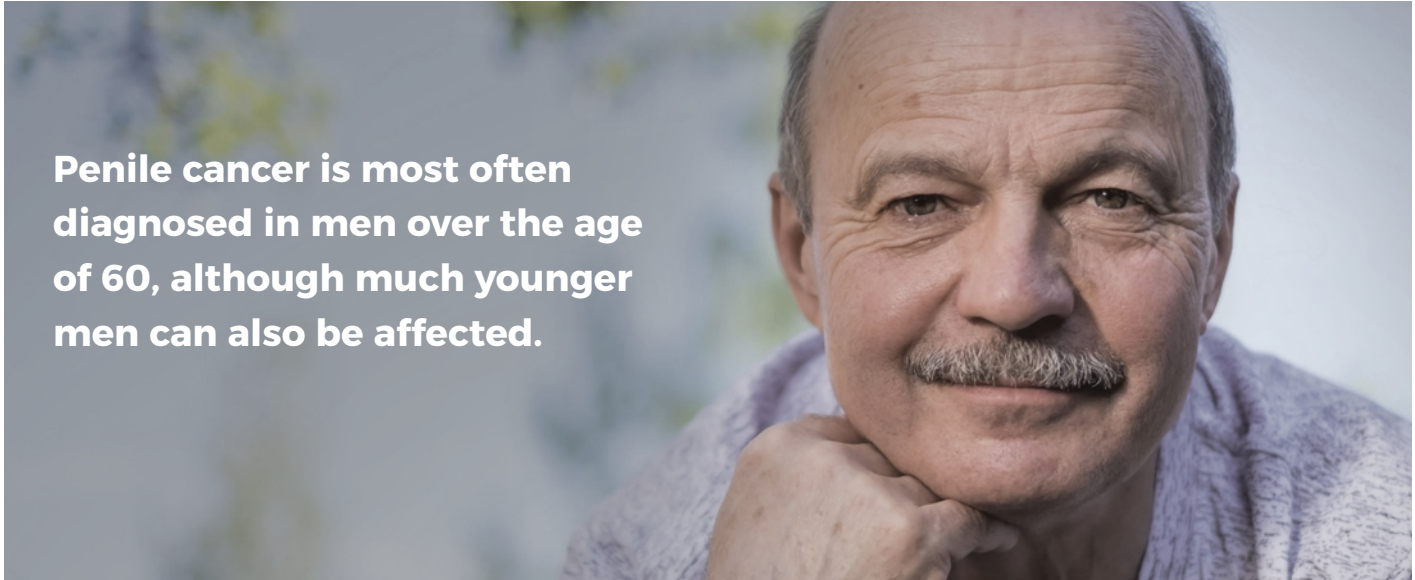


This factsheet is one of three. Download the [prostate and testicular cancer factsheets](https://orchid-cancer.org.uk) at [orchid-cancer.org.uk](https://orchid-cancer.org.uk)

# Penile cancer

There are around 760 cases of cancer of the penis in the UK each year.



**Penile cancer is most often diagnosed in men over the age of 60, although much younger men can also be affected.**

## Risk factors for penile cancer

### Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)

There are many different types of HPV which are spread by direct skin to skin contact. Common types cause warts and verrucas and are not linked to the development of cancer. Some types of HPV are transmitted via sexual intercourse and two types of HPV virus (types 16 and 18) are considered high risk. These can infect the anus, penis, throat and cervix and are linked with the development of some cancers in these areas.

Normally the body's immune system is able to kill the virus, but sometimes the virus can persist for many years without causing any symptoms and then develop into cancer or a pre-cancerous condition. Most of the world's population will be exposed to some form of HPV during their lifetime, and practising safe sex using a condom may help reduce the risk of being exposed to some high risk types of HPV.

### Phimosis

This is the inability for a man to retract his foreskin over the head of the penis. It can occur due to chronic inflammation (balanitis) or be present from birth. It is thought that a tight foreskin may increase the risk of harmful substances collecting underneath which can increase the risk of penile cancer developing.

### Smoking

Smoking appears to increase the risk of penile cancer, possibly because of chemicals which are passed out in the urine from inhaling smoke from tobacco which may accumulate under the foreskin.

### HIV

Infection with HIV can increase the risk, reducing the body's immune system from functioning as well as it should.

## Tips for staying healthy

- It is a good idea for men to practise regular genital hygiene which may help them identify a potential problem at an early stage.
- Men should always seek medical advice if they find anything on their penis that does not look normal.

Because penile cancer is so rare, many health care professionals may never have treated it before. Early symptoms may be similar to common non-cancerous conditions and it can be difficult to diagnose.

If men are being treated for a penile condition which does not improve after an initial course of specified treatment or if there is any doubt as to the nature of an abnormality on the penis, they should ask their GP to be referred urgently to a hospital specialist called a urologist for further assessment.

Most referrals will not be found to be cancer but it is better to get an expert opinion straight away.

## Signs and symptoms of penile cancer

Cancer can develop anywhere in the penis but the most common places are on the glans (head of the penis) or foreskin.

If you experience any of the following signs or symptoms, you should get them checked out:

- **A growth or ulcer, especially on the glans or foreskin**
- **Changes in the colour of the penis**
- **Skin thickening on the penis**
- **Irregular swelling at the end of the penis**
- **Persistent discharge with foul odour beneath the foreskin**
- **Blood coming from the tip of the penis or under the foreskin**

- **Irregular or growing bluish-brown flat lesions or marks beneath the foreskin or on the body of the penis**

- **Reddish, velvety rash beneath the foreskin**

- **Small bumps beneath the foreskin**

Remember, many of the above symptoms can also be caused by other medical conditions not related to cancer, but it is important that you seek expert advice early.

**There are over 58,000 new cases of male-specific cancers in the UK each year. Learn more about the signs, symptoms and risk factors at [orchid-cancer.org.uk](https://orchid-cancer.org.uk)**

**Call the Orchid Confidential Male Cancer Helpline on 0808 802 0010**

**or email [helpline@orchid-cancer.org.uk](mailto:helpline@orchid-cancer.org.uk)**

Orchid is an award-winning charity dedicated to supporting the needs of those affected by male cancers.\* We fund pioneering research, raise awareness and offer a range of support services to anyone affected by penile, testicular or prostate cancer.

\* Trans women, non-binary people and some intersex people who were assigned male at birth may also be at risk of these cancers.

