

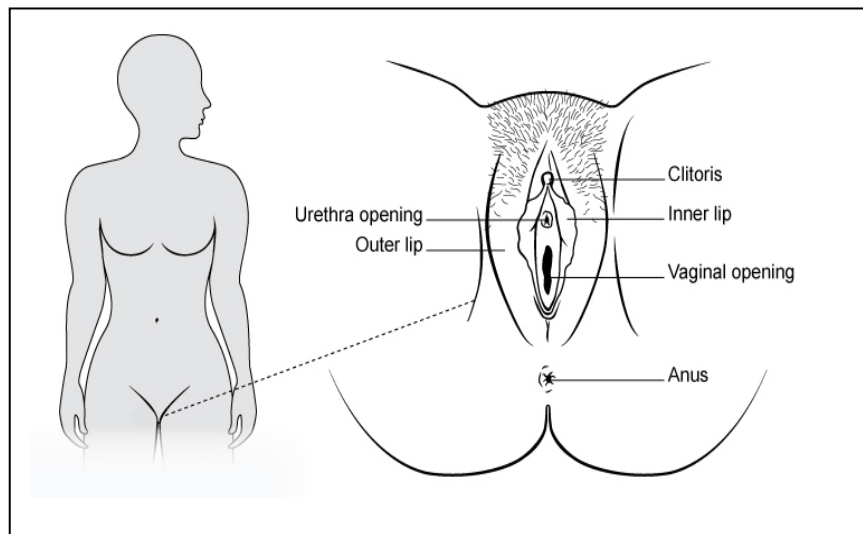
Quick Facts about Vulvar Cancer



PMH

What is the vulva?

The vulva is the external (outside) part of the female genitals. The vulva includes the outer and inner lip, the clitoris, and the openings to the urethra and the vagina.



What is vulvar cancer?

Vulvar cancer is a disease in which normal cells of the vulva begin to change, grow uncontrollably, and form a mass of cells called a tumour. Vulvar cancer usually affects the outer lip, but may also affect the inner lip or the clitoris.

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Created: 12/2010

Form: D-5729



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What does stage mean?

The stage is a way of describing a cancer. Stage can describe:

- where the cancer is located
- if or where it has spread
- if it is affecting other organs in the body

There are four stages for vulvar cancer (Stage 1 to Stage 4). Your doctor will use the stage of your cancer to decide which treatment is best for you.

How is vulvar cancer treated?

The treatment of vulvar cancer depends on:

- the size and location of the tumour
- whether the cancer has spread
- your overall health

Surgery is often the first treatment and may include the removal of parts of the vulva or the entire vulva. Radiation therapy and chemotherapy may also be used.

Most side effects of vulvar cancer treatment can often be prevented or managed with help from your health care team. Talk with your doctor about all treatment options.

Coping with Vulvar Cancer

Dealing with the news of a cancer diagnosis can be very difficult. You are not alone. Your health care team is here for you so feel comfortable speaking with them about your concerns and needs. As a patient in the Princess Margaret Cancer Program, you have access to many resources to help you cope. These include:

- social workers who can help you better cope with your illness
- clinical dietitians that specialize in cancer and can help you with your nutrition and diet concerns
- the PMH Cancer Survivorship Program which has programs and services to help you cope with cancer and its treatment, including:
 - a Survivorship Consult to answer questions you may have about your diagnosis and treatment and the resources available to you

- Caring Voices (www.caringvoices.ca), an online support community where you can connect with other gynecologic cancer survivors through the Gynecologic Cancer Community
- a Patient & Family Library where you can ask a Librarian to search for specific health information and borrow books, CDs and DVDs

For more information about the services available to you or to contact a social worker or dietitian, speak to a member of your health care team. To contact the PMH Cancer Survivorship program visit:

- The Cancer Survivorship Centre located on the 2nd floor of PMH
- The Patient & Family Library located in the atrium on the main floor of PMH
- ELLICSR: the Health, Wellness and Cancer Survivorship Centre located in the basement of the Clinical Services Building in the Toronto General Hospital

Questions to Ask your Doctor

Speaking to your health care team is important in helping you make decisions about your health care. Sometimes preparing a list of questions you want to ask can be helpful. Here is a list of common questions you may want to ask your doctor:

1. What type of vulvar cancer do I have?
2. Can you explain my pathology report (test results) to me?
3. What stage is the vulvar cancer?
4. Has cancer spread to my lymph nodes or anywhere else?
5. Would you explain my treatment options? What clinical trials are open to me?
6. How will this treatment benefit me?
7. How will this treatment affect my daily life? Will I be able to work, exercise, and do my usual activities?
8. Will this treatment affect my ability to become pregnant or have children?
9. What are the possible long-term side effects of my cancer treatment?
10. Where can I find emotional support for me and my family?
11. Whom do I call for questions or problems?
12. Is there anything else I should be asking?

Medical Terms to Know

Benign: A tumour that is not cancerous

Biopsy: Removal of a tissue sample that is then examined under a microscope to check for cancer cells

Chemotherapy: The use of drugs to destroy cancer cells

Lymph node: A tiny, bean-shaped organ that fights infection

Malignant: A tumour that is cancerous

Metastasis: The spread of cancer from where the cancer began to another part of the body

Oncologist: A doctor who specializes in treating people with cancer

Prognosis: Chance of recovery

Radiation therapy: The use of high-energy x-rays to destroy cancer cells

Tumour: A mass of tissue that requires a biopsy/removal

Vulvectomy: Surgery to remove the vulva