

GENITAL WARTS

PERSONAL HEALTH FACT SHEET

What are genital warts?

Genital warts are a viral, sexually transmitted disease (STD). They are caused by several types of the human papilloma virus (HPV). Most sexually active people will have HPV at some point in their lives.

How is it spread?

Genital warts are spread during oral, anal or vaginal sex or other skin-to-skin contact with someone who has genital warts. Genital warts can also be spread from one place to another on the same person's body (auto-inoculation), for example, by a razor when shaving.

How is it treated?

In people with a healthy immune system, the warts will usually go away without treatment. There are several types of treatments available for genital warts. All of them remove the visible warts, but the virus will remain in the body and the person may continue to have recurrences. It is important that infected people have their warts removed by a health professional. Drugs sold over the counter are not designed for use on genital warts and may be harmful. The most common form of treatment is a health care professional applying acid to the affected area. Cryotherapy (freezing of the area) and laser therapy are also available and usually remove the wart faster than acids do, but are more costly.

How can we prevent genital warts?

- Don't have sex. You cannot give or get an STD if there is no sexual activity.
- If you choose to have sex, be prepared. Have condoms with a water-based lubricant on hand and use a new condom every time you have sex.
- Limit your number of sexual partners.
- Telling your partner. If you have been diagnosed with genital warts, tell anyone you have had sex with that they should consider being examined for genital warts.
- Have regular exams if you are sexually active. If you think you have genital warts, get checked.
- A pap smear is an excellent test to look for HPV changes on the cervix. Having annual pap smears can reduce the long-term complications associated with HPV.
- A vaccine is available to prevent infection from 4 of the most common types of HPV. It is available for both females and males, 9-26 years of age.

SYMPTOMS OF GENITAL WARTS

A person with this disease may have:

- small bumps, with an irregular, "cauliflower-like" surface
- itching, pain, or even bleeding of bumps
- no symptoms

Symptoms may appear 2-3 months after contact with an infected person, but it can take up to 2 years before a visible wart is present.

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