



Genital Warts

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- Caused by human papilloma virus (HPV)
 - More than 100 different types of HPV strains, though only about 25 types responsible for causing warts in genital area
 - Other types can cause warts elsewhere on the body, such as the hands and feet
- Most common viral sexually transmitted infection (STI)
- Both men and women can become infected

Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms of HPV may become present from one month up to a year after one has been exposed to the virus. Genital warts may resemble other common types of warts. They may be flat or rough and may show up as small hard bumps or skin tags that look like mini cauliflowers. The warts may be present in the mouth, around the anus or the genitals. Occasionally, you may experience itching and irritation, pain during sex and/or vaginal or rectal bleeding.

Because it is also possible to have lesions or warts inside your urethra, vagina or rectum, or not to have any warts at all, you may not know that you are infected. This does not mean that you do not have the virus! Even though you might not show symptoms, you may still be a carrier of the virus and may unknowingly pass it on to your sexual partner.

Spread

Genital warts are very contagious! You can become infected by coming in direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected person, usually through unprotected oral, vaginal or anal sex. While rare, it is possible to contract genital warts through nonsexual contact.

Pregnancy: It is possible for an infected mother to pass on the virus to her baby during vaginal delivery.

Diagnosis

There is no easily available test for HPV. Your doctor may oftentimes be able to tell if you have genital warts by looking at them. Because not all HPV infections are visible to the naked eye, your doctor may apply a vinegar solution to the affected area to find the possible lesion.

Women: Pap tests are an important part of a physical examination, as they may help detect the presence of HPV and abnormal cells which could lead to cervical cancer. If you have an abnormal test, your doctor may request a procedure called a colposcopy. During this procedure, a specialist examines the cervix and upper vagina using a magnifying lens.

Men: If HPV is suspected, your doctor may perform a procedure called an endoscopy. This procedure is similar to the colposcopy and is used to detect warts within the urethra.

Complications

If untreated, warts may block off the urethra, cervix, vagina or anus. Infants who are

infected with HPV during delivery may develop warts in their throat and other areas.

Women: Some HPV strains can cause cell changes on the cervix which can be linked to cancer of the cervix.

Men: In men, HPV may be linked to the development of cancer of the penis.

Treatment and Prevention

You can treat the symptoms of the virus, however, once you are infected, you cannot be cured.

Genital warts do not have to be removed. If you choose to remove them, you can be treated at your doctor's office or at a clinic. All treatments are designed to remove the warts. Some common treatments include:

- The application of medication to burn the warts off—medication such as 5-FU, podophyllin or trichloroacetic acid (TCA) may be used
- Freezing
- Surgery
- Laser

You may need more than one treatment to remove the warts. Your doctor will advise you if more treatments are needed. Because drugs cannot kill the virus, the warts can come back and you may need more treatment. In certain situations, it is possible for some warts to disappear without treatment.

Cure

There is NO CURE for genital warts! Once you have the virus, you will always be at risk for flare-ups or for infecting someone else, even if you do not show signs or symptoms.

Medical Follow-up

You should see your doctor to treat any visible warts.

Women: Women who have HPV should see their doctor for a yearly Pap test. Those who have had an abnormal Pap test should see their doctor for more frequent Pap tests and/or colposcopy.

Additional Information

- Follow the prescribed course of treatment and return to see the doctor, as directed
- While being treated for the warts, avoid sexual bodily contact with your partner
- Talk to your partner! Let them know if you have HPV so that they can be checked and treated, if need be
- Women with HPV should have a yearly Pap test
- Get tested for other infections! You can have more than one STI and not know it, so it is important to get tested

****If you have any type of infection in the genital area, it is important to inform your partner so that they can also be properly examined and treated if need be****

This information is for general knowledge only and does not replace professional medical advice. For STI testing or more information, contact our confidential sexual health clinic at 519-753-4937 ext. 471.