



Genital Warts

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 become infected with HPV at some point in their lives.

How are genital warts 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, for example, by a razor when shaving.

How are genital warts 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, to treat warts, 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 are genital warts prevented?

- **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.** The more people you have sex with, the greater the chance you have of getting an STD.
- **Tell your sex partner(s).** 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.
- **For females, 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.

HPV vaccine can protect males and females against some of the most common types of HPV that can lead to disease and cancer.

- Both girls and boys should receive 3 doses of HPV vaccine to protect against HPV-related disease. HPV vaccination can start as early as age 9 years. HPV vaccine is given over a six month time period. It is important to get all three vaccinations to get the best protection. HPV vaccine is available for both females and males, 9-26 years of age. The vaccines are most effective when given at 11 or 12.

Symptoms of genital warts:

Genital warts begin as a small bump or group of bumps in the genital area. They can be small or large, raised or flat, or shaped like a cauliflower. Genital warts may be itchy, painful, or even bleed. Many people have genital HPV with no symptoms. They can unknowingly pass it on to their sex partners. 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.

Long-term complications:

Certain types of HPV can lead to an increased risk for cervical, throat and other cancers. Women with HPV should have regular pap smears to detect any early signs of cancer.

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