

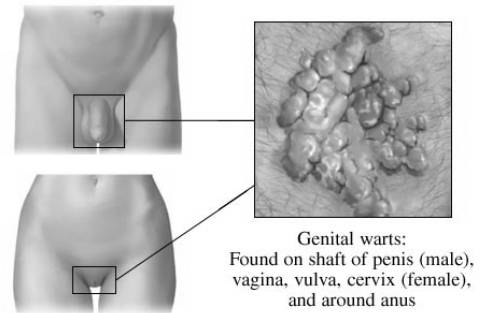
Genital Warts (HPV)

Genital Warts or HPV is a highly contagious sexually transmitted infection caused by the certain strains of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV). These warts are spread through direct skin-to-skin contact during oral, anal or vaginal sex with an infected partner; keep in mind, penetration orally, vaginally or anally is not required to transmit this virus.

There are more than 160 strains of HPV, some of which cause warts on the hands and feet, where other cause the warts on the genitals. In addition, some people infected with HPV never get warts that they can see or many never get warts, so most people with HPV do not know they have it. The most concerning strains of HPV are those that have been linked with abnormal cell changes on the cervix and cervical cancer. These cervical changes can be identified through pap smears.

The most common symptoms of HPV are:

- Flesh colored, soft-to-the-touch bumps, may look like cauliflower
- May be single or grow in clusters
- Typically painless, but may itch
- In woman - can occur inside or outside of the vagina, or on the labia, groin or thigh
- In men - can occur on the tip or head of the penis, scrotum, groin or thigh



Genital warts may go away but the virus may remain in the body for a long time. Warts may or may not return after the first episode. A person's immune system fights the virus and eventually, most HPV infections resolve spontaneously in 1-2 years.

After the spontaneous resolution (in 1-2 years), the body's immune system can remember the virus type and prevent that particular type of HPV infection. Because there are many types of HPV, developing immunity to one HPV type does not offer protection from other types. If exposed to another type of HPV, genital warts can reappear.

Any person who is sexually active can be exposed to this common virus. Ways to reduce the risk are:

- Abstinence is the best way to avoid an STI.
- Be open and honest with your sexual partners.
- Having sex with one partner who has sex only with you. People who have many sexual partners are at higher risk of contracting HPV and other STIs.
- If someone has visible symptoms of genital warts, he or she should not have direct skin to skin contact until the warts are gone. This may help to lower the risk of giving the virus.
- Condoms used the correct way from start to finish with each sexual encounter helps provide some protection - but only for the skin that is covered by the condom. Condoms do not cover all genital skin, so they don't give 100% protection.

Very often our bodies fight off the virus. If so, the warts may go away with no treatment. That's why a lot of people choose to just wait for the warts to go away on their own. But you may choose to get genital warts treated if the warts are uncomfortable, or you don't like the way they look. Warts can be removed with various treatments. Talk with your health care provider to decide which treatment might be best for you.

There are several medicines that can be applied directly to genital warts, depending on where they are located. Some prescription genital warts treatments can be used at home. Other treatments must be applied by your health care provider. Some genital warts treatments can cause discomfort. And some cannot be used during pregnancy.

Genital warts also may be removed by freezing them. This is called cryotherapy. They may be burned off. This is called electrocauterization. Or they may be removed with surgery or with lasers. In some cases, they are treated with injections of interferon, another type of medication. Like all medications, genital warts treatments have risks and side effects. Your health care provider can explain them to you and help you deal with the side effects of your treatment.

Points to remember if you have been diagnosed with genital warts:

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- Sexual partners need an exam only if any unusual bumps in the genital area are present. Also, routine annual exams for women partners are recommended.
 - If you have genital contact (vaginal, oral, or anal), consider using condoms or dental dams.
 - Keep your immune system strong. Maintain a high level of wellness. Eat nutritious food, and get adequate exercise and rest. Do not smoke. Avoid drugs and limit alcohol intake.

Web links for more information:

- Web MD: <http://www.webmd.com/sexual-conditions/hpv-genital-warts/default.htm>
- Family Doctor.org: <http://familydoctor.org/online/famdocen/home/common/sexinfections/sti/389.html>
- Mayo Clinic: <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/hpv-infection/DS00906>
- Planned Parenthood: <http://www.plannedparenthood.org/health-topics/stds-hiv-safer-sex/genital-warts-4268.htm>
- American Social Health Association: http://www.ashstd.org/hpv/hpv_overview.cfm

If you are a registered Millersville University student and you have questions or you need to make an appointment, please call Millersville University Health Services at 872-3250.



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