

New York State Department of Health

Genital Warts (venereal warts, HPV)

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What are genital warts?

This sexually transmitted disease (STD) infects the skin. Genital warts are also called venereal warts or HPV.

What causes genital warts?

Genital warts are caused by one of the most common viruses in the United States - the human papillomavirus. There are more than 100 types of HPV. Thirty-five types infect the genitals.

The warts are soft, fleshy bumps that vary in size and shape. They can appear on or around the penis or the scrotum - the pouch of skin that contains the testicles. They can also appear on or around the vagina, anus, mouth or inside the body where they can't easily be seen. The warts will be the color of your skin and cauliflower-shaped. Only 5 percent of people have warts that can be seen with the naked eye.

How can I get HPV?

HPV is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with someone who is infected. You can get HPV from someone who has warts on his or her mouth, skin or genitals. The genital wart virus can still rub off a person's skin even when he or she has no warts that you can see. Remember: You can get or give warts even when both of you have no signs or symptoms.

What are the signs and symptoms?

The majority of people with the genital wart virus (HPV) have no signs and symptoms of infection.

Warts:

- Usually appear one to three months after you are exposed, but it may take longer.
- Begin as small red bumps that may grow larger.
- In men and women, they can appear on any damp or moist areas of your body. This includes your vagina or vulva, penis, and anus.
- They are usually painless, but if the warts are injured, they may become painful or tender when touched.

Sometimes the virus may cause an unusual fluid (discharge) from your vagina or an itchy vulva. The vulva is the outer part of a woman's genitals.

Can HPV cause any more problems?

Yes! Certain types of HPV can lead to cancer of the cervix (the narrow, open end of the uterus) or less common cancers of the anus in both women and men. These types can also cause cancer of the penis in men.

In some pregnant women, or people with HIV, warts can become quite large. Some pregnant women with large warts may need a Cesarean delivery (C-section).

It is very rare, but HPV can cause warts in the throats of infants within a few weeks after birth. This is most common in infants of young women who get HPV for the first time late in their pregnancies.

How will I know if I have Genital Warts?

If you have warts or red bumps on your genitals you should visit your health care provider for a checkup. Your provider can usually look at the area and tell you if they are genital warts, or may do additional tests based on your age.

Is there a cure?

No. HPV is a chronic, lifelong infection. However, as many as one out of every three people with genital warts find that they go away on their own - usually within two years. There are a variety of methods for removing warts. If you want your warts removed, do not do it yourself, visit a health care provider who will:

- Freeze them with liquid nitrogen, or
- Use laser surgery, or
- Destroy them with a chemical or acid medicine.

Or your provider may prescribe a medicine that you can apply yourself. It is called imiquimod (I mi kwi' mod) or Aldara™ cream. Aldara helps the body use its own strength (immune system) to destroy the virus. You can apply Aldara directly to your warts. But, do not use Aldara for warts on the cervix or inside the vagina.

None of these treatments cure the virus. Even if your warts disappear, they may return because the virus may be hidden in nearby, normal looking skin.

What about my partner(s)?

HPV is a sexually transmitted disease (STD). Because of this, your sex partners should be checked for symptoms. Even though your partners may not have symptoms that can be seen, they still need to be checked for HPV and other STDs.

When can I have sex again?

You should wait to have sex for two weeks after the warts have gone away and the area has healed. You should also tell your current and future sex partners that you have genital warts. Remember: you can spread HPV to your partners even when you don't have any symptoms and cannot see any warts.

Will anyone know the results of the exams?

The test results and any treatment will be kept **absolutely confidential**. No one can find out your results, except you. If you are under 18 you can be checked and treated without getting your parent's permission.

How can I prevent HPV?

A new HPV vaccine is available for females aged 9-26 years and is effective against four types of HPV. The HPV vaccine is the first vaccine developed to prevent most cervical cancers, and genital warts. Doctors recommend this vaccine for 11 and 12 year old girls. Ideally girls should get this vaccine before their first sexual contact when they could be exposed to HPV. This is because the vaccine prevents HPV in females who have not yet been exposed to the HPV types covered by the vaccine. Consult your doctor for details.

Not having sex (abstinence) is the only sure way to avoid infection. If you are sexually active you can lower your chances of giving or getting genital warts by limiting your number of sex partners and using latex or polyurethane condoms. Condoms should be used each time you have oral, vaginal or anal sex. Using condoms will not totally stop the risk of giving or getting genital warts because HPV may appear on parts of the body other than those covered by the condom. Condoms also help prevent the spread of other STDs including HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

If you are sexually active, you and your partner(s) should get a full physical checkup. This includes a complete sexual history and testing for common STDs. You should be checked for gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis, herpes, genital warts, trichomoniasis and HIV.

To learn more:

If you have any more questions about genital warts, or you need to know the location of the nearest clinic, contact your [local health department](#).

You may also call the National STD Hotline at 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636).

Questions or comments: stdc@health.state.ny.us

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