

Genital Warts and HPV

What are genital warts and HPV?

Genital warts are a sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV).

HPV is the world's most common sexually transmitted infection and is spread by skin-to-skin (including sexual) contact. HPV infects cells inside and outside of the body. These include surfaces of the skin, lining of the mouth, tongue, throat, tonsils, vagina, penis, cervix, and anus.

Most people who get HPV do not have any signs or symptoms and may spread the disease without knowing.

How are they spread?

There are many types of HPV viruses but genital warts are mostly caused by HPV types 6 & 11.

Genital warts are very contagious and are spread during oral, vaginal, or anal sex with an infected partner, or just skin-to-skin contact:

- About 65% of people who have sexual contact with a partner with genital warts will develop warts, usually within 3 months of contact.
- Genital warts may last for years, and in time go away. Even if they go away, the HPV virus can remain inactive, and return at a later date.

How are they diagnosed?

Genital warts are identified by their appearance. If you have genital warts, you should be tested for other possible sexually transmitted infections (e.g. gonorrhoea, chlamydia).

Genital warts are small, fairly firm lumps, often with an irregular cauliflower-like appearance. The shape and colour vary based on location.

What are the symptoms?

Genital warts can grow quickly inside or outside the vagina, usually within 3 months of contact. Untreated warts can grow large enough to block the vaginal, urethral or rectal openings.

Women

Warts most often appear on the vulva and the perineum - between the vaginal opening and the anus - but can also occur in the vagina, cervix, and anus. Warts can be itchy, and cause problems during pregnancy.

Men

Warts usually appear near the tip of the penis, sometimes under the foreskin, and less often on the shaft of the penis, or scrotum and anus.

Treatment

No treatment can promise a cure. Treating the warts may get rid of them but the virus can remain in your body causing future outbreaks. For some, HPV may eventually clear the body.

Some warts, present for a long time, may be difficult to treat. Depending on the size, number and location, treatments include:

- Medication - applied to warts
- Freezing - using liquid nitrogen
- Electrosurgery - uses an electric current
- Laser therapy - "vaporizes" cells

Follow-up

Complete treatments until warts disappear. If any remain, they can continue to spread. Treatment often takes a long period of time. If it is unrealistic to abstain from sex, use condoms. A condom may reduce your risk of getting HPV, but the virus can still be spread by contact with skin that is not covered by a condom. Women with genital warts and HPV should have regular pap tests.

Source:

The Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada



COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES DEPARTMENT

Environmental Health & Prevention Services

160 Exmouth Street
Point Edward, Ontario N7T 7Z6
Telephone: 519 383-8331
Toll free: 1-800-667-1839
Fax: 519 383-7092
Email: chsd@county-lambton.on.ca
www.lambtonhealth.on.ca