

# WARTS, GENITAL

(Condyloma Acuminata; Human Papillomavirus [HPV]; Venereal Warts)



## BASIC INFORMATION

### DESCRIPTION

Warts in the genital area (including the urethra, genitals and rectum). These are more contagious than other warts. They are considered the most common sexually transmitted disease (STD) and can affect both sexes. Incubation period may be several months' duration. Men and women can have HPV with no signs or symptoms, but still be contagious and transmit the infection.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Genital warts have the following characteristics:

- They appear on moist surfaces, especially the penis, entrance to the vagina and entrance to the rectum.
- Warts may be small, flat, flesh-colored bumps, or tiny, cauliflower-like bumps.
- Each wart measures 1 mm to 2 mm in diameter, but clusters may be quite large. They may be so small that you can't see them.
- They often produce no symptoms, or may cause itching, burning, tenderness or pain.
- Genital warts in children may be a sign of sexual abuse.

### CAUSES

Genital warts (termed condyloma acuminata) are caused by a subtype of the same virus that causes other warts, the human papillomavirus (HPV), but they are more contagious. They spread easily on the skin of the infected person and are transmitted via sexual activity to other people. They have an incubation period of 1 to 6 months, but can take years to develop. Approximately twenty million people are currently infected with HPV.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Presence of other sexually transmitted disease.
- Multiple sexual partners; not using condoms.
- Crowded or unsanitary living conditions; poor nutrition.
- Poor hygiene; smoking.
- Immunosuppression.
- Vitamin A or folic acid deficiency.
- Unprotected anal intercourse can spread warts to the rectum.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- Avoid having sex at all.
- Have sex only with someone you know does not have genital warts and is having sex only with you.
- Using condoms may help prevent transmission; however, condoms can't always cover all affected skin.

### EXPECTED OUTCOME

- These small warts usually cause no symptoms. If untreated, some will disappear spontaneously. However, because the virus may be sexually transmitted, it is important to obtain medical treatment. Warts themselves are not life-threatening. The warts may grow rapidly during pregnancy, but often resolve postpartum.
- Recurrence is common.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

- Female cervical disorders; most types of HPV can cause mild Pap smear abnormalities that do not have serious consequences. Some specific types cause abnormalities that could lead to cancer.
- In pregnancy, the warts can cause the skin of the vagina to tear more easily and make it more difficult to repair if an episiotomy or laparotomy procedure is performed. Pregnant women can pass

HPV to their baby during vaginal delivery. A newborn that is exposed to HPV during delivery can develop the infection. A positive HPV status does not necessarily indicate a cesarean delivery.

- Though some types of HPV infection carry an increased risk of genital cancer, the type of HPV causing common genital warts is normally not implicated in this group. More than 100 distinct types of HPV have been identified to date.



## TREATMENT

### GENERAL MEASURES

- The genital warts can often be diagnosed with a physical examination. A vinegar-like solution placed on the skin turns the warts white for easier diagnosing. Sexual partners should be screened for the disorder also.
- Other diagnostic tests may include biopsy of tissue; colposcopy, androscopy, anoscopy (all 3 involve use of a magnifying glass to view body parts); and Pap smear.
- Treatment will be determined by size and location of warts. Even though the warts can be removed, the viral infection can't be cured. This is why the warts often return. Visible genital warts can be removed, but no treatment is better than another, and no single treatment is ideal for all cases. Pregnant women with genital warts require special treatment.
- Small warts may be treated with topical applications.
- In some cases, application of liquid nitrogen to warts (cryotherapy) freezes the tissue.
- Some larger warts require laser treatment, electrocoagulation or surgical excision.
- Don't treat these warts yourself with nonprescription drugs used for wart removal on the hands. They can make the genital area very sore.
- For more information, check the library or the internet.

### MEDICATION

- Treatments can generally be done as office procedures.
- A topical medication may be prescribed for use at home. Apply it carefully to avoid damaging surrounding healthy tissue. Use petroleum jelly on surrounding tissue first. Don't apply to large areas at one time. This may cause irritation or absorption of the drug. Wash off after 4 hours. Keep the medication out of eyes.
- Alpha interferon injections into each wart with a very small needle may be recommended (usually considered if other treatment methods are unsuccessful or warts recur frequently).

### ACTIVITY

No restrictions, except to avoid sexual relations until treatment is completed.

### DIET

No special diet.



## NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

- You or a family member has symptoms of genital warts.
- The following occur after treatment:
  - Treated area becomes infected (red, swollen, painful or tender).
  - Signs of infection develop, such as fever, chills, headache or muscle aches.