



Fact Sheet: Genital Warts (HPV)

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).

What are the symptoms?

Genital warts begin as small bumps, often with an irregular, "cauliflower-like" surface. Genital warts may be itchy, painful, or even bleed.

In women genital warts are found:

- On and around the lips and opening of the vagina
- Inside the vagina and cervix
- On the anus and rectum

In men genital warts are found:

- On the shaft of the penis, scrotum, glans, foreskin, and penis opening (urethra)
- On the anus and rectum
- Inside the urethra

Some infected people have no symptoms at all and can unknowingly pass it on to their 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.

How is it spread?

Genital warts are spread during oral, anal or vaginal sex or other skin-to-skin contact with someone who has genital warts. HPV can also be spread from one place to another on the same person's body (auto-inoculation).

How is it treated?

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. Do not use drugs sold over the counter (i.e., Compound W) since they are not designed for use on genital warts and may be harmful. Acid is the most common form of treatment, applied by a health care professional. Cryotherapy (freezing of the area) and laser therapy are also available and usually work faster to remove the wart than acids do, but are also more costly. There are prescription treatments that can be applied at home, for some individuals.

How is it prevented?

- **Don't have sex.** You cannot give or get an STD if there is no contact with the penis, vagina, mouth or anus.
- **Limit your number of sexual partners.** The more people you have sex with, the greater the chance of getting an STD.
- **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.
- **Have regular exams if you are sexually active.** If you think you have HPV, get checked. Your health care provider can examine you for all STDs.
- **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.
- **Telling your partner.** Tell anyone you have had sex with that they should consider being examined for HPV changes.

Long-term complications:

Certain types of the HPV can lead to an increased risk for cervical and other cancers. Women with genital warts should have regular Pap smears to detect any early signs of cancer.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information, call your health care provider or 257-3612.

Visit our website at: www.gchd.us or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: www.cdc.gov

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