

# WARTS, GENITAL (human papilloma virus)

## TO YOUR HEALTH - PATIENT EDUCATION HANDOUT

### DESCRIPTION

Warts in the genital area may include warts of the urethra, labia, vulva, vagina, penis, scrotum, and rectum. These are more contagious than other warts. Evidence suggest that the virus that causes genital warts may also be associated with cancers of the genital area. They affect both sexes of sexually active adolescents and adults. This is a common sexually transmitted disease. These warts can also occur, although less frequently, in the mouth and throat.

### FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

Genital warts have the following characteristics:

- They appear on moist surfaces, especially the penis, vagina, cervix, and rectum.
- In many cases, warts are not visible to the naked eye. In other cases, they make look like small, hard spots or have a fleshy, cauliflower-like appearance.

### CAUSES

Genital warts are caused by subtypes of the human papilloma virus (HPV), the same type of virus that causes common warts in other locations. They spread easily on the skin of the infected person and pass easily to other people and can be transmitted sexually. They may also be passed from a mother to her newborn during childbirth. The incubation period may be one to six months, or even several years.

### RISK INCREASES WITH

- Multiple sexual partners; other sexually transmitted infections and not using condoms.

### PREVENTIVE MEASURES

As with any sexually transmitted infection not engaging in sexual intercourse is the surest way to avoid warts. If you have sexual intercourse, and you or your partner is male, always use latex condoms. If you or your partner have genital warts, avoid touching or scratching the warts. Avoid sexual activity until warts heal completely.

### EXPECTED OUTCOME

In most cases, genital warts can be eliminated by proper treatment. However, as with many viral infections, HPV is not totally eliminated from the body. Recurrence is common. The goal of treatment is to enhance control of the virus by the immune system.

### POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Female cervical changes called dysplasia, or cervical intraepithelianeoplasia (CIN), which may progress to cancer. In males, urinary obstruction and in rare instances, cancer of the penis.

### GENERAL MEASURES

Diagnostic tests may include application of vinegar and examination with magnification, Pap smears, colposcopy, andoscopy, anoscopy, and biopsy of tissue. Treatment will be determined by size and location of warts. Some forms of treatment may cause temporary pain or discomfort. Current treatments include trichloroacetic acid (TCA), podophyllin, liquid nitrogen, cryotherapy, laser surgery, 5-fluorouracil (5-FU) cream, and interferon. Podofilox is approved for home use, but it can only be used on warts that are visible and easy to reach. Your health care provider will explain which is the most appropriate for you, if treatment is required. Follow-up visits are needed for any treatment method to succeed and multiple treatments are often required. More frequent pap smears are generally indicated.

### ACTIVITY & DIET

As with any virus, you are less susceptible to infection when you are in good health. Keep your immune system strong by eating nutritionally sound meals, getting sufficient sleep, exercising regularly, managing stress, avoiding tobacco (smoking increases the risk of cancer of the cervix), avoiding alcohol and mood-altering drugs, and avoiding vaginal infections.

### FINDING SUPPORT

Some people diagnosed with HPV infection have felt depressed, angry, guilty, or frustrated. Accepting the diagnosis and talking to your sexual partner may be difficult and having to get repeated treatments may be discouraging, but keep in mind that many people have the same feelings and concerns. In time, most people stop having any recurrences or problems related to HPV. Call the Wellness Center at (618)536-4441 for more information, counseling or support.

### NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF...

- The treated area becomes infected (red, swollen, painful or tender).
- You have fever higher than 101°.
- You feel generally ill.

Student Health Center



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This information is for educational purposes only. Consult your doctor for specific medical advice, diagnosis and treatment.

618-453-3311

Dial-A-Nurse is available after-hours until 10:30 p.m. during fall and spring semesters. In case of emergency dial 911.