

Genital Warts - Facts

What are Genital Warts?

Genital warts (Condylomata Accuminata) are a viral infection caused by exposure to the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) [hyperlink]. There are many types of HPV. Genital warts are not linked to cervical cancer. Although HPV infection may be as common as affecting between a third and half of all sexually active adults, only approximately one in a hundred (1%) of this group will go on to develop warts. Warts are often self-limiting, but can be very distressing. It can take between 3 weeks and 8 months to develop warts after being infected.

How are genital warts passed on?

Genital warts can be passed on through skin-to-skin intimate contact with someone who has the wart virus or through sharing sex toys. The virus can remain in the body and be passed on before warts become noticeable or after they have disappeared. It is rare but possible for warts to be transmitted through oral sex or when giving birth.

You cannot catch warts through sharing cutlery, toilet seats, towels, swimming pools, baths, cups and plates.

What are the symptoms of genital warts?

Genital warts are fleshy growths of different shapes and sizes which may be visible on the ano-genital skin or could be located inside the vagina or anus.

Genital warts may cause no symptoms at all or could be itchy and bleed when scratched.

How are genital warts diagnosed?

Warts are usually easily diagnosed by a Doctor or Nurse upon inspection of the skin. If the diagnosis is uncertain, a biopsy [hyperlink] or swab may need to be taken.

Why should genital warts be treated?

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Left untreated warts may disappear on their own; but this may take a long time. Warts can also become larger, become infected or increase in number and cause irritation. When warts increase in size and become clustered, there is a slight increase in risk for malignancy, such as rectal cancer.

There is, unfortunately, no treatment for the virus itself and it may remain in the body for some time.

How are warts treated?

The size of the warts usually determine the type of treatment:

Application of medicines such as Podofilox and Imiquimod (can be applied at home in some cases)

Freezing with liquid nitrogen

Electrocautery (low voltage electrified probe) or laser

Warts can be treated by your GP or your local sexual health (sometimes called Genito-Urinary Medicine or GUM) clinic. It is important to avoid sexual activity with your partner until both of you have been successfully treated and to wear condoms to protect against reinfection and transmission. It is important to remember that the virus can still be transmitted even if there are no signs of warts and condoms are the best defence against infection.

Do I have to tell my partner?

It is advisable for your sexual partners to have a check-up with their doctor and get treatment if necessary. Condoms should be worn to protect both of you against infection.

If you would like to book a Genital Warts test or consultation simply call our dedicated client services team on 0333 920 1607 or email sexualhealth@nuffieldhealth.com