



Genital Warts Fact Sheet

Genital warts are a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) caused by certain types of human papillomavirus (HPV). Warts are most common on the penis, in and around the vagina, on the cervix (opening to the womb), and around the anus. Warts found on the hands and feet are not caused by the same types of HPV that cause genital warts.

Q: How do you get genital warts?

A: The viruses (certain types of HPV) that cause warts are spread by direct contact with infected skin or warts during sexual activity. Some people with HPV grow visible warts, but most do not. It is possible to have been infected with HPV for months or years without any signs or symptoms. HPV can be passed to a sex partner **even when no actual warts are present.**

Q: What do genital warts look like?

A: Warts usually appear as soft, moist, pink, or flesh-colored raised growths or bumps that are the same color as the surrounding skin. They can be single or multiple, smooth or rough, small or large. Some warts appear almost flat on the skin.

Q: Are genital warts serious?

A:

- For most people, genital warts are just a bother and are treated only for comfort or cosmetic reasons.
- In women, different kinds of HPV can cause changes in the cells of the cervix. In some cases, these abnormal cells can lead to cancer. **Yearly Pap smear tests to check for abnormal cells are recommended for all women.**

Q: How are genital warts treated?

A:

- For some people, genital warts will go away on their own.
- A health care provider can remove warts by using liquid nitrogen, topical liquids, or other methods. Also, home treatments are available by prescription.
- It often takes several treatments for the warts to go away. Warts may return, even after treatment. This is because the virus can stay in the skin even if no warts are visible.



IMPORTANT: OVER-THE-COUNTER (NON-PRESCRIPTION) WART TREATMENTS SHOULD NOT BE USED IN, ON, OR AROUND THE GENITAL OR ANAL AREA.

Q: How can I avoid getting genital warts?

- A:**
- Abstinence (not having sex) is the only sure way to avoid infection.
 - If you are female, you may benefit from the **new HPV vaccine**. Talk with your doctor about the vaccine and if it might be of benefit to you <http://www.cdc.gov/std/hpv/STDFact-HPV-vaccine.htm>
 - Plan Ahead:** Think about protecting yourself. Talk with your sex partner(s) about STDs and the need to protect yourself. Then, you can choose not to have sex (abstinence), or decide to:
 - Use a male condom with each sex partner;
 - Use a female condom when a male condom cannot be used.
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HIV IS ALSO A STD!

When you catch HPV, you could also be getting HIV.

Birth control pills or a birth control shot cannot protect you against HPV or other STDs.

 **USING CONDOMS CORRECTLY EVERY TIME YOU HAVE SEX CAN REDUCE THE CHANCE FOR TRANSMISSION OF GENITAL WARTS ONLY IF THE INFECTED AREAS ARE COVERED OR PROTECTED BY THE CONDOM.**

Q: Where can I get more information about STDs and referrals for STD testing?

- A:**
- **Phone:** Talk to a trained operator who can answer your questions and provide information about STD testing. **In English and Español 24 hours/day, 7 days/week:** Toll-free: 1-800-CDC-INFO (1-800-232-4636); TTY for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing: 1-888-232-6348
 - **Internet:** Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <http://www.cdc.gov/std/>
http://www.cdc.gov/std/healthcomm/fact_sheets.htm

Talk to your own health care provider, or call your county health department by looking for the telephone number in the phone book (white pages) under county government. Ask to speak to someone in the STD clinic or STD program for more information about HPV and genital warts.