

GENITAL WARTS

WHAT ARE GENITAL WARTS?

Genital warts are warts found in the genital area which are caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV). There are about 100 types of HPV and genital warts are caused by about 40 types of HPV. Two strains of HPV, **types 6 and 11**, cause 90 percent of genital warts.

Certain types of HPV have been linked to an increased risk of genital cancers.

The types of HPV that cause genital warts are generally different than the types that cause cancer.

SYMPTOMS

Symptoms may appear from one month to two years after exposure therefore it is difficult to know when you got the virus.

Genital warts may look or feel like hard small bumps or tiny skin tags that look like cauliflower. Larger warts may be pink, white, brown, or grey and occur alone or in clusters. Warts are usually not painful or itchy but may cause itching or pain during sex as well as vaginal or rectal bleeding.

Warts can develop around the genitals, in the mouth, thighs or anus. Warts can be on the vulva (vaginal lips), in the vagina and on the cervix. Warts may develop on a penis, scrotum or in the urethra.

Anal warts are small white or flesh-colored growths that can occur on the skin around the anus and inside the anal canal. They can range from very small to large and extensive. Warts are usually painless and may be noticeable just as bumps on the skin. They may cause itching, bleeding, or mucus discharge from the anus.

HOW IT SPREADS

You can get HPV by having vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone who has the virus. It also spreads through close skin-to-skin touching during sex.

A person can be infected with HPV without any symptoms or very few symptoms for months or even years, but still may be able to pass the infection on to a sexual partner. The HPV virus can remain in the body for weeks, years or even a lifetime.

If you are sexually active, you can get HPV, even if you have had sex with only one person.

It is possible to develop symptoms years after having sex with someone who has the infection. This makes it hard to know when you first got it.

HPV is very contagious. If you have HPV, your sexual partner(s) should be informed and examined, and you should avoid any sexual contact when there are visible warts. It is important to talk about HPV with your partner(s) before having sex.

DIAGNOSIS

Your health care provider can often tell if you have genital warts just by looking at them.

The presence of vaginal genital warts may be found during testing for other sexually transmitted infections or when your health care provider is doing your cervical cancer screening (Pap test).

PUBLIC HEALTH

1-800-361-5653

TTY: 1-866-512-6228

york.ca/sexualhealth

TREATMENT AND FOLLOW-UP

All visible warts should be treated to reduce risk of transmission and of complications. Although most HPV infections occur without symptoms, and go away without treatment, sometimes HPV does not go away on its own. It is also important to know warts may return, and require further treatments, especially in the first three months of treatment

Genital warts can be treated at your health care provider's office or at a clinic; your health care provider will discuss treatment options and follow-up with you.

All people with a cervix should have regular Pap tests following Ontario's Cervical Screening guidelines or as recommended by their health care provider.

PREVENTION

- The risk of being exposed to HPV increases with having sex at an early age, having many sex partners, or having sex with someone who has had many partners
- A vaccine called Gardasil 9 is available to protect against HPV; talk to your healthcare provider about Gardasil 9
- Be in a mutually monogamous relationship – or have sex only with someone who only has sex with you
- Make informed decisions by talking to your partner about their sexual health and the use of condoms or dental dams, before having sex
- If you have genital warts follow the treatment as prescribed by your health care provider or clinic
- Avoid sexual or close physical contact with sexual partner(s) while your warts are being treated
- Tell your partner(s) you have genital warts so they can be checked and treated
- Use condoms from beginning to end of any oral, anal, or vaginal sexual contact to reduce the chance of passing on HPV; condoms may not fully protect against getting HPV as the virus can infect areas the condom does not cover, but using a condom can reduce the chance of HPV transmission

COMPLICATIONS

If warts are left untreated, they can form large clusters that may block the urethra, anus, cervix, or vagina. Infants infected with HPV during delivery can develop warts in their throat.

IMPORTANT MESSAGES

You and your partner should know:

- There is no way to know when you got HPV or who passed the infection to you
- It is not understood why certain people with wart-causing types of HPV get genital warts and why others do not

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- sexandu.ca
- York Region Public Health Sexual Health Clinics **1-800-361-5653, # 1**