

Genital warts are caused by low-risk types of human papillomavirus (HPV). These viruses may not cause warts in everyone.

# Genital Warts

## How are they spread?

Women can get genital warts from sexual contact with someone who has HPV. Genital warts are spread by skin-to-skin contact, usually from contact with the warts. It can be spread by vaginal, anal, oral, or hand-genital sexual contact. Genital warts will spread HPV while visible, and after recent treatment. Long-term sexual partners usually have the same type of wart-causing HPV.

## What are signs of genital warts in women?

Genital warts can grow anywhere in the genital area:

- ◆ In the vagina.
- ◆ Around the vaginal opening.
- ◆ On the cervix (the opening to the womb).
- ◆ On the groin.
- ◆ In or around the anus.
- ◆ In the mouth or throat (rare).

Genital warts:

- ◆ Can be any size – from so small they can't be seen, to big clusters and lumps.
- ◆ Can be smooth with a "mosaic" pattern or bumpy like a cauliflower.
- ◆ Are soft, moist and flesh-colored.
- ◆ Can cause itching, burning or pain.

Not all HPV infections cause genital warts. HPV infections often do not have any signs that you can see or feel. Some HPV infections can be more serious, see **HPV**, page 31.

**Even if you can't see any genital warts, you could still have an HPV infection.**

### How do you know if you have genital warts?

Genital warts can be detected by:

- ◆ Yourself.
- ◆ A sexual partner.
- ◆ A health care provider.

The only way to confirm HPV infection is if your health care provider does an HPV test.

### How is it treated?

See your health care provider to discuss treatment. Even when genital warts are treated, the HPV infection may remain. Warts may also return after treatment. Over-the-counter treatments for other types of warts should not be used. Treatments for genital warts include:

- ◆ Watch and wait to see if the warts stay the same, get bigger, or go away.
- ◆ Medicines applied directly to the warts. These can include prescribed creams.
- ◆ Burning off the warts.
- ◆ Freezing off the warts.
- ◆ Cutting the warts out.
- ◆ Using special lights or lasers to destroy the warts.



## What can happen if you have genital warts for a long time?

The immune system fights HPV infection. The types of HPV that cause genital warts do not cause cancer. Without any treatment, genital warts may:

- ◆ Go away.
- ◆ Remain unchanged.
- ◆ Increase in size or number.

## If you have genital warts:

- ◆ Discuss treatment for genital warts with your health care provider.
- ◆ Know that it you may never know when you got HPV or who gave it to you.
- ◆ Know that partners that have been together for a while often share the same HPV types, even if both have no symptoms.

**Condoms may not fully protect against HPV since HPV can infect areas not covered by a condom.**

## How can you avoid genital warts?

- ◆ Get vaccinated against HPV.
    - Certain types of HPV vaccines protect against the low-risk HPV that causes 90% of genital warts.
    - HPV vaccine is safe for all females 9 to 26 years old.
    - The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends all 11-12 year old girls get the HPV vaccine.
  - ◆ Avoid sexual contact.
  - ◆ Have safer sex:
    - Reduce the number of sexual partners.
    - Condoms, when used correctly, can reduce the risk of getting HPV.
- But, condoms may not cover all infected areas. Each time you have sex use a condom (male or female type):
- Before vaginal sex.
  - Before anal sex.
  - Before oral sex.
- Have sex with only one partner who does not have sex with others and does not have HPV.
- ◆ Know that other forms of birth control do not protect against HPV.



## What about pregnancy?

Genital warts rarely cause problems during pregnancy and birth. Most women who no longer have visible genital warts do not have problems with pregnancy or birth. If you are pregnant, you should discuss treatment options with your health care provider as the warts may:

- ◆ Grow larger and bleed.
- ◆ Make it difficult to urinate if growing in the urinary tract (rare).
- ◆ Make the vagina less elastic during birth if the warts are in the vagina (rare).
- ◆ Cause a need for a cesarean section (C-section) birth if the warts block the birth canal (rare).
- ◆ Be passed to the baby during birth (rare).

## For more on genital warts see:

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):*

*Human Papillomavirus (HPV)*

[www.cdc.gov/hpv/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/hpv/index.html)

*Genital HPV Infection – Fact Sheet*

[www.cdc.gov/std/HPV/STDFact-HPV.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/std/HPV/STDFact-HPV.htm)

*HPV Vaccination*

[www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/hpv/default.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/hpv/default.htm)

*National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID/NIH):*

*Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and Genital Warts*

[www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/genitalWarts/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/genitalWarts/Pages/default.aspx)

*U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Office on Women's Health:*

*Human papillomavirus (HPV) and genital warts fact sheet*

[www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/human-papillomavirus.cfm](http://www.womenshealth.gov/publications/our-publications/fact-sheet/human-papillomavirus.cfm)