

Genital warts & HPV

Also known as human papilloma virus, genital HPV

Genital warts is a common STI, caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV) and can be passed on by skin-to-skin contact during sex.

QUICK FACTS

- Most people infected with genital HPV have no symptoms but can still pass the infection on to others during sex
- Many people infected with HPV don't even have any warts
- Warts are passed on by having vaginal or anal sex or genital skin-to-skin contact with someone who has genital HPV
- Treatment options are prescription creams or paints as well as freezing and laser treatment

What is this?

Genital warts are growths or bumps in the genital area that vary in appearance, size, shape and number. Some have a cauliflower-like appearance.

Genital warts are caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV). The majority of sexually active people will be exposed to HPV infections during their lifetime. Most HPV infections clear up without treatment.

Sometimes HPV infection is responsible for genital cancers, however this is uncommon and is not caused by the HPV types that cause genital warts.

How do you get it?

Genital warts and HPV are spread by direct, skin-to-skin contact during vaginal or anal sex. Warts may appear within several weeks of exposure or they may take months to appear.

What are the symptoms?

You may notice a lump or lumps in the genital area. Sometimes people don't notice warts because they are inside the vagina, on the cervix or in the anus.

You should go to a doctor if you notice:

- bumps or skin changes on your penis, vagina, vulva or anus

- any unusual itching, pain or bleeding

You should also go to a doctor if a sexual partner tells you that they have HPV or genital warts.

How do you test for it?

Genital warts are diagnosed on visual inspection of the genital area by a doctor or nurse.

There is no single test for HPV, so it's best to see your doctor.

How is it treated?

See your doctor to find the right treatment for genital warts.-

If you are pregnant or think you might be, tell your doctor.

Treatment does not get rid of HPV. It only treats the visible warts. For most people the body's natural immunity will get rid of the virus over time.

Treatment by a doctor

- **Cryotherapy** - to freeze the warts
- **TCA (trichloroacetic acid)** - to paint on and remove the warts
- **Laser treatment** - occasionally recommended to remove the warts (requires a general anaesthetic)

Treatment you can apply yourself

- Podophyllotoxin (Condyline Paint™) paint for external genital warts. Not recommended for use in pregnancy. Requires a prescription from your doctor.
- Imiquimod (Aldara™) cream for external genital and perianal warts. Also not recommended in pregnancy.-Requires a prescription from your doctor.

Regardless of the treatment used:

- Don't use over the counter treatments which are not specifically for genital warts.
- Treatment can often take several visits to the doctor and a variety of approaches, so be patient.

Side-effects and treatment

The common side-effects of cryotherapy, Condyline Paint™ and Aldara™ are:

- localised skin irritation
- ulceration
- pain or discomfort

You can try having a mild-saltwater bath-or taking over the counter pain relief (such as paracetamol) to ease these side-effects.

If these side-effects persist, see your doctor.

Are there any complications if not treated?

Treatment does not get rid of HPV. It only treats the visible warts. For most people the body's natural immunity will get rid of the virus over time.

Is it likely to come back after treatment?

Treatment can often take several visits to the doctor and a variety of approaches, so be patient.

How can I protect myself?

Condoms and dams can help, but they don't cover all areas of your genital skin.

A vaccine is available which can prevent infection with the nine HPV types (6, 11, 16, 18, 31, 33, 45, 52 and 58) which cause most genital warts and genital cancers.

Speak to your doctor about vaccination options:-

Where can I get help?

- Visit a [sexual health service near you](#)
- Visit your local doctor
- Visit your local community health centre

DISCLAIMER

This fact sheet provides general sexual health information and is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor.

If you have concerns about your health, you should seek advice from your doctor.

If you require urgent care, you should go to your nearest Emergency Department or call [000](#).