

HPV - Human Papillomavirus (Genital Warts)

Description

Genital warts are caused by certain strains of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) and are usually harmless. There are more than 100 different types of HPV currently identified and close to 1/3 of these are associated with sexually transmitted diseases. A person can be infected with more than one type of HPV at the same time. Many people with HPV never know they have it because visible warts do not always develop.

Symptoms

Genital warts usually appear in the genital area or anus and infrequently may develop in the mouth or throat.

IN **WOMEN**, GENITAL WARTS ARE FOUND:

- Around the vulva (entire outer female genital area)
- In or around the vagina
- In or around the anus, the groin (where the genital area meets the inner thigh), or the cervix (opening of the uterus)

IN **MEN**, GENITAL WARTS ARE FOUND:

- On the foreskin
- On the head or shaft of the penis
- On the urethra
- On the scrotum (balls)
- In or around the anus

Genital warts typically look like fleshy growths on the skin. They can be single or clusters and have a cauliflower-like appearance. They also can appear as elevated bumps, smooth bumps or they can be invisible to the naked eye. Genital warts are usually painless, but some people may have itching, a burning sensation during intercourse or slight bleeding at the wart site.

If left untreated, they may go away, stay the same, or increase in both size and number. Genital warts do not turn into cancer. Other strains of HPV that do not cause genital warts have no symptoms.

It usually takes from one to six months after transmission for warts to begin to appear, but it occasionally takes years after exposure.

Transmission

HPV is spread by direct skin-to-skin contact with an infected individual. Transmission is typically from vaginal, oral, or anal sexual contact. The virus can also be transmitted from mother to infant during childbirth. HPV is highly contagious and the virus can be transmitted whether or not visual warts are present. People between the ages of 18 to 28 have the highest rates of HPV infection.

Diagnosis

Genital warts are often diagnosed by visual examination of the genital area by a medical provider. In many cases, genital warts are invisible to the naked eye. The following methods can be used as additional diagnostic tools to correctly identify the presence of genital warts FOR WOMEN:

CYTOLOGY

A Pap smear, in which a sample of cells from the cervix is obtained for microscopic examination.

VIRAL TESTING

If a Pap smear abnormality is found, a sample can be taken from the cervix and analyzed for the presence of the HPV virus. HPV testing in the presence of a normal Pap smear is not usually performed.

Diagnosis (Continued on page 2)

COLPOSCOPY

This procedure magnifies the cervix so that the clinician can make a visual diagnosis. Frequently, a small biopsy is performed to obtain a piece of tissue for diagnosis.

Because there are no symptoms of most HPV strains, it is important for women to get Pap smears to examine the cervix and screen for changes that could indicate the presence of HPV or cervical cancer. There is currently NO HPV TEST FOR MEN.

ALL SEXUAL PARTNERS OF PERSONS WITH HPV SHOULD BE CLINICALLY SCREENED FOR THE PRESENCE OF WARTS SINCE THEY OFTEN GO UNDETECTED.

Treatment

Although there is no cure for HPV, most cases are temporary and clear without medical intervention. Studies of the natural history of HPV showed that on average, HPV infection lasts for approximately 8 months. The majority of women clear their HPV infections within one year through their own natural immune process.

The purpose of treatment is to control outbreaks of warts. Some warts may require more than one treatment.

CURRENT TREATMENTS TO REMOVE WARTS INCLUDE:

- ACIDS
- ELECTROCAUTERY
- FREEZING
- SURGICAL EXCISION, LASER TREATMENT, AND CHEMOTHERAPY AGENTS MAY BE USED IN SERIOUS CASES.

The following common methods of treatment are available at SDSU Student Health Services:

CRYOSURGERY

The freezing of warts, usually by the application of liquid nitrogen.

PODOPHYLLIN

A chemical that is easy to apply and is effective for mild to moderate outbreaks. This liquid is applied to external genital warts. The treated area should be washed 4-6 hours after application. It may be necessary to continue treatment on a weekly basis until the warts disappear.

TRICHLOROACETIC ACID

Similar to podophyllin but doesn't need to be washed off.

ALDARA OR PODOFILOX

Medicines that are self-applied and may occasionally be prescribed by your provider for home treatment.

Post-treatment discomfort is common. There is also a small risk of scarring, discoloration of the skin, local nerve injury, and infection.

CAUTION!

DO NOT USE OVER-THE-COUNTER DRUG STORE COMPOUNDS, THEY ARE INTENDED FOR REGULAR WARTS AND CAN BE HARMFUL WHEN APPLIED TO THE GENITALIA.

REMEMBER: GENITAL WARTS CAN GO AWAY BY THEMSELVES BUT MAY GROW AND MULTIPLY, MAKING TREATMENT MORE DIFFICULT. SINCE RE-INFECTION IS POSSIBLE, PARTNERS SHOULD BE TREATED AND CONDOM USE SHOULD CONTINUE.

Complications

Certain types of genital HPV are associated with an increased risk of cancer of the vagina, vulva, cervix, anus, and penis.

Most HPV infections never lead to the development of cervical cancer - even in the absence of medical intervention - and treating pre-cancerous cervical lesions detected by Pap tests has greatly reduced the rate of invasive cervical cancer. It is very important for women to have regular Pap smears.

Cancers of the vagina, vulva, anus, and penis occur infrequently.

Pregnant women with warts very rarely pass the virus to their baby during delivery. Unless otherwise indicated, a vaginal birth is safer for the baby than a c-section.

Prevention

- ABSTAINING from vaginal, anal, and oral sex is the best protection from HPV infection and all STDs.
- LATEX BARRIERS (dental dams/condoms) used correctly for each sexual encounter will reduce risk of transmission.
- HPV IS TRANSMITTED BY SKIN-TO-SKIN CONTACT. Therefore it is important to understand that condoms may not completely protect you from this infection.
- ASK YOUR PARTNER(S) IF THEY HAVE HAD GENITAL WARTS because they may be spread from areas not protected by condoms.
- FEMALES NEED TO HAVE ANNUAL PAP TESTS to prevent complications from HPV infection.
- GARDASIL VACCINE is a series of 3 administered injections which can decrease the chance of contracting certain types of HPV. It is approved FOR BOTH MEN AND WOMEN.

For More Information:

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