



Hiding in Plain Sight

At least half of those infected with genital warts virus have no visible warts, but they are still contagious.

It can be difficult to know whether a raised area on the skin is a wart, because the skin in the genital area is irregular in appearance in most people. Any bumps or growths should be examined by a health care professional.

The skin around warts can spread the virus whether warts are visible or not. When the warts are not visible, HPV is "latent"; the virus may still be present in the body.

Only a doctor or nurse can tell for certain if a person is infected with HPV. It is important for sexually active men and women to be examined for genital warts and other STDs each year. Always tell your doctor if you have had genital warts.

Talking to Your Doctor

It is important to tell your doctor everything. Tell him or her which parts of your body have been in sexual contact so those areas can be checked for warts. It is normal to feel scared, worried, or embarrassed, but doctors are there to help you.

The most important thing is getting the treatment you need. Remember, information will be kept confidential.

Never attempt to remove a genital wart by yourself.

There is no cure for genital warts. The goal of treatment is to get rid of the visible warts. Your doctor will recommend the right treatment for you.

The Ugly Truth

Anyone who has sexual contact is at risk for genital warts. Genital warts (venereal warts) is a sexually transmitted disease (STD) caused by a virus. Doctors call the virus *human papillomavirus* or HPV. Genital warts spread through skin-to-skin contact with someone who has the virus.

Approximately twenty million people in the U.S. are currently infected with genital warts. They occur most commonly among men and women aged 20 to 24, but no one is ever too young or too old to get genital warts.

Petting or genital rubbing can transmit the virus. You could get warts without having intercourse. Genital warts spread through heterosexual or homosexual contact. You cannot get genital warts from a toilet seat.



For More Information

Go to www.intheknowzone.com for an extension of this pamphlet.

Increase your knowledge using the information, statistics, images, and links.

Test your understanding with a quick quiz.



National STD Hotline:
(800) 227-8922

**Don't stay in
the dark.
Get In the Know!**

Genital Warts

all too common



in the know

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Finding Warts

Some genital warts are very small and cannot be seen. Others are very large. Some are in areas that cannot be seen without medical instruments.



It may take months for genital warts to appear. They are not always in the genital area (penis, vagina, cervix, or anus). They can also appear on the lower abdomen or the upper thighs.



Genital warts can be raised or flat, and are usually harder than the surrounding skin. Raised warts may look like cauliflower.



Color may vary but tends to be pink in moist areas, like the external vaginal area, and yellow-gray on dry areas of the skin. They vary in size and may grow together to form larger warts.

People do not get genital warts by touching other warts on their hands or feet.

Genital warts can hurt if scratched or picked, in which case they can become irritated. Some warts are itchy. Warts can also cause bleeding or painful discharges.



Complications of Genital Warts

Very rarely, infants can contract the virus from infected mothers during birth. A baby that is exposed during delivery can develop warts in the larynx (voice box).



The virus (HPV) that causes genital warts has been linked to cancer of the cervix (opening to womb).

HPV is a reason that sexually active women must have annual Pap tests. Pap tests find cervical cancer in its treatable stages. Women with genital warts may be asked to have more frequent Pap tests.

HPV and Cervical Cancer
www.intheknowzone.com/hpv/cancer

Treatment for Warts

Never try to remove warts yourself or treat them with an over-the-counter medication or home treatment.

Treatments a doctor may use include:

- Freezing warts with liquid nitrogen.
- Creams you apply to the skin.
- Electrosurgery or laser surgery.

Genital warts may go away after treatment, but see your doctor for follow-up. Genital warts can be removed, but the virus stays in your body. Your doctor will tell you when it is safe to have sex again.

If you got genital warts from your sex partner, you should talk with him or her about getting tested for other STDs.

Preventing Genital Warts

The only absolutely positive, 100% sure way to avoid getting genital warts is to never have skin-to-skin contact on your genitals. You may decide not to have sex until you are married or in a committed relationship. If you or your partner have been sexually active in the past, you should be tested for STDs before you have sex with each other.

Avoid pressure to have sex until it is right for you. Do not let partners, peers, or the media pressure you to do something that can harm you, maybe permanently.

Condoms are only partly useful in preventing genital warts. A condom may not cover all of the infected skin. Still, latex (rubber) condoms are the best protection available.

Preventing HPV

www.intheknowzone.com/hpv/prevention



Don't use alcohol or drugs. If you are drunk or high, your decision-making ability can be poor. You may be more likely to engage in sexual activity you will regret later.

Abstinence or an exclusive, committed relationship are the best ways to prevent genital warts or any STD. If you are sexually active, whether or not you have intercourse, use condoms or other barriers between skin and skin, and go for regular medical check-ups.

Finding Help

Your doctor or healthcare professionals at a clinic can diagnose genital warts. Public health and family planning clinics give free or low cost care. All visits are private, personal, and confidential.

More Information and Help
www.intheknowzone.com/hpv/help