



What are genital warts?

Genital warts are caused by a virus called human papillomavirus (HPV). This virus infects the skin that covers the anal and genital areas. HPV is spread from person to person from sexual and skin-to-skin contact. The warts usually appear one to six months after infection, but may appear many years later. Some people who are infected never get warts. Genital warts are not cancer. Genital warts are a common problem, with 24 million Americans having HPV infection

What are the symptoms of genital warts?

Genital warts are usually rough, dry, and painless growths that often look like a small cauliflower. They can grow on any part of the genitals or anus. The warts can be flesh colored, pink, or light gray. While most warts look like a small cauliflower, some are very tiny and hard to see or feel. Other warts can be flat topped or dome shaped. Some people have many warts that can grow to form a large group.

Genital warts can cause itching, pain, irritation, and bleeding in both men and women. Women may also have vaginal bleeding and discharge from irritated genital warts



What tests are needed?

After asking about your medical history and doing a physical exam, your doctor will probably be able to look at the growth and tell if it is a genital wart. Your doctor may need to take a piece of the wart to be looked at under a microscope. Depending on where your warts are, your doctor may have to examine the inside of your anus. Your doctor may also order blood tests to make sure the growth is not being caused by another illness. Other tests may be needed to see if you have any other sexually related diseases.

For women: your doctor will do a pelvic exam and Pap smear to look for more warts or another sexually related problem.

For men: your doctor may send you to a urologist, a doctor who specializes in the urinary organs, to look for more warts.

Your doctor will want to see you several weeks after treatment to make sure the warts have gone away and have not grown back

What treatment is needed?

There are several ways to treat genital warts. They can be removed by:

- Medicine - the most common first treatment. Depending on the size and type of wart, cream can be applied for days or weeks. Several different medicines are in use
- Burning/freezing - usually used for small warts
- Lasers/surgery - usually used for people with many warts or large warts

It is important that both you and your sexual partner are treated so you do not reinfect each other. Sometimes the warts come back after treatment and need to be treated again.



Do

- Do wash your hands with soap and warm water after going to the bathroom or touching the warts
- Do practice safe sex - wear a condom
- Do keep the warts and the surrounding skin clean and dry
- Do be honest with your sexual partner about having genital warts so both of you may be treated
- Do use all the medicine your doctor gives you
- Do stop smoking, as smoking can increase your risk of genital warts
- Do (for women) have regular pelvic exams and Pap smears because HPV infection can increase your risk of cervical cancer



Don't

Don't have sex until both you and your sexual partner have been successfully treated and your doctor tells you it is OK to have sex.



Recovery time

- Most warts can be treated by your doctor
- Rarely, a surgeon will be needed to remove the wart
- Some medicines are used for up to 16 weeks
- It may take one to two weeks for the treated skin to heal
- Some warts may grow back and have to be treated again



What can be done to stop it from happening again?

- After treatment, do not have sexual relations until your doctor says it is OK to do so
- Avoid sexual relations with many partners
- Stop smoking, as smoking can increase your risk of genital warts
- Always keep your genitals clean
- Not having sexual relations is the best way to avoid genital warts. However, when this is not possible, practicing safe sex can reduce the risk. This can include using latex condoms every time you have sex, and limiting sexual contact to one uninfected partner



Further information on genital warts can be found from:

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