

Genital Warts

Overview

What are genital warts?

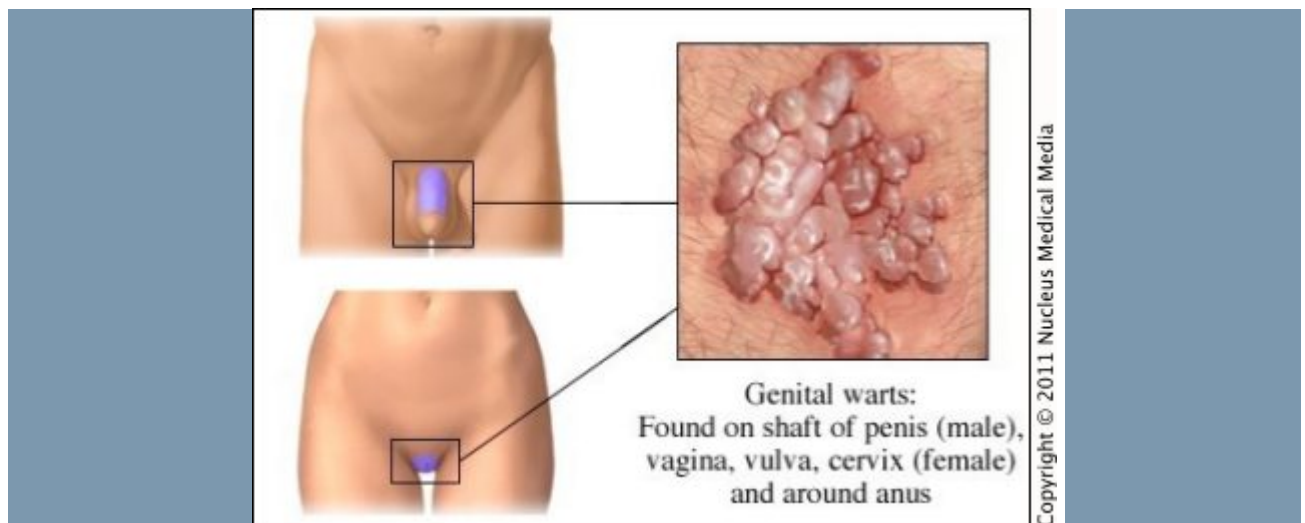
Genital warts may be small, flat, flesh-colored bumps or tiny, cauliflower-like bumps.

Genital warts are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). There are many kinds of HPV. Not all of them cause genital warts. HPV is associated with cancer of the vulva, anus and penis. However, it's important to note that HPV infection doesn't always lead to cancer.

Symptoms

Where do genital warts grow?

In men, genital warts can grow on the penis, near the anus, or between the penis and the scrotum. In women, genital warts may grow on the vulva and perineal area, in the vagina and on the cervix (the opening to the uterus or womb). Genital warts vary in size and may even be so small that you can't see them.



Causes & Risk Factors

How do you get HPV?

HPV is a sexually transmitted infection (STI). The most common way to get HPV is by having oral, vaginal or anal sex with someone who is infected with HPV. The only sure way to prevent genital warts is to not have sex. If you are sexually active, having sex only with a partner who isn't infected with HPV and who only has sex with you will lower your risk of

getting genital warts.

Just because you can't see warts on your partner doesn't mean he or she doesn't have HPV. The infection can have a long incubation period. This means that months can pass between the time a person is infected with the virus and the time a person notices genital warts. Sometimes, the warts can take years to develop. In women, the warts may be where you can't see them--inside the body, on the surface of the cervix.

Using condoms may prevent you from catching HPV from someone who has it. However, condoms can't always cover all of the affected skin.

Diagnosis & Tests

How are genital warts diagnosed?

If you notice warts in your genital area, see your doctor. Your doctor may be able to diagnose the warts just by examining you. For women, a Pap test can help detect changes on the cervix that are caused by genital warts can cause.

Treatment

Can genital warts be treated?

Yes. Genital warts must be treated by your doctor. Do not try to treat the warts yourself.

The warts can be removed, but the viral infection itself can't be cured. The virus goes on living inside your skin. This is why the warts often return after they have been removed. You may need to have them removed more than once.

How are genital warts removed?

One way to remove the warts is to freeze them. This is called cryotherapy. The warts can also be taken off with a laser.

A treatment called the loop electrosurgical excision procedure (LEEP) can be used to remove the warts. With this method of removal, a sharp instrument shaped like a loop is passed underneath the wart and the wart is cut out of the skin.

Special chemicals can be used to remove the warts. These chemicals dissolve warts in the genital area. They may have to be applied to the area a number of times over a period of several weeks before the treatment is complete.

Chemicals you can buy at the store to remove warts from your hands *should not* be used for genital warts. They can make your genital skin very sore.

Complications

What if I don't get genital warts treated?

Genital warts can grow if you do not get them treated. If you are sexually active, you also risk infecting your partner.

Certain kinds of HPV can cause abnormal cells to grow on the cervix. Sometimes, these cells can become cancerous if left untreated. Other kinds of HPV can cause cancer of the

vulva, vagina, anus, or penis.

Other Organizations

- [American Social Health Organization](#)
- [Medline Plus STI Information](#)
- [I Wanna Know](#)
- [Planned Parenthood](#)

Questions to Ask Your Doctor

- What treatment is best for me?
- Is there any way I can keep my boyfriend/girlfriend from getting genital warts?
- Is there any special hygiene plan I need to follow while I'm being treated?
- Will my genital warts come back?
- Will my infection cause any future problems?
- How long will my treatment last?
- How often will I need to see my doctor?

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