

Genital Warts

What are genital warts?

Genital warts appear on the genitals or sexual organs of men and women and can also appear on the buttocks or “bum”. Warts appear as tiny flat bumps, or bumps that look like cauliflowers. Some people can have the wart virus present in their skin even though the warts cannot be seen.

Warts are caused by infection from the human papilloma virus (HPV). There are many types of HPV, and some are linked to pre-cancerous changes in the cervix. The types of HPV that cause genital warts are not thought to be linked to cervical cancer.

If you are a sexually active woman, you should have a regular pap smear test to help detect any pre-cancerous changes to the cervix.

How is it spread?

Genital warts are spread by having sex with someone who is infected with HPV, whether they have visible warts or not.

Using a male or female condom will provide some protection, but only to the skin covered by the condom. Condoms do not cover all genital skin so they do not protect the area 100 per cent. Avoid having sex with someone who has sores or unusual growths on or around their genitals.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms can include wart-like bumps on your genitals and/or around your buttocks. These need to be checked by a health professional. It may take from four weeks to three months, or longer, for the warts to appear after you have been infected; sometimes they never appear. You can be infected with the virus but not have any visible warts.

What is the treatment?

Treatment for genital warts does not get rid of the HPV infection. A person treated for genital warts may still be able to transmit the infection.

In some cases, the warts will go away on their own. However, many people want to be treated to remove the visible warts and also to lessen the chance of giving them to a partner.

Genital warts can be treated by applying a liquid medication or by freezing them. You may need to go for more than one treatment. Your doctor may prescribe a cream that you can apply to the affected area for 4-6 weeks. Discuss treatment options with your health professional to determine which treatment choice may be best for you.

Caution: Do not use non-prescription wart removal products to treat genital warts. These products are not intended to be used in the genital area and may cause serious burning.

Should I be tested for other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs)?

If you have different sexual partners, or if your partner has different partners, you should also be tested for other STDs including gonorrhea, chlamydia, syphilis and HIV (the virus linked to AIDS). You should also consider getting vaccine shots to prevent hepatitis B infection.

Please remember: The more sexual partners you have, the higher your risk of getting a STD.

Ways to reduce your risk of getting a sexually transmitted disease

- Have sex with only one partner who has been tested for sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), who has been treated if necessary and who is having sex only with you. The more partners you have, the higher your risk of getting an STD.
- Use a female or male condom every time you have sex. Condoms offer protection against STDs, but they must be used properly.
- Have regular check-ups for STDs.
- Decide not to have sex.

Important facts about condoms

- A condom acts like a barrier that helps prevent the exchange of body fluids, the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, and pregnancy.
- A new condom should be used each time you have sexual intercourse (anal, vaginal, or oral sex).
- Check the expiry date on the condom package.
- Use only water-based lubricants with the male latex condom. Oil-based lubricants, such as petroleum jelly, lotion or baby oil, can weaken and destroy latex.
- Female condoms are made of polyurethane. This material can be used with any type of lubricant, water-based or oil-based.
- Some lubricants contain chemicals called spermicides to help protect against unwanted pregnancy. If they irritate your genitals, don't use them.
- Do not use a male condom together with a female condom as the friction created may cause tearing of either product.
- If a condom breaks during sex remove it immediately and apply a new condom.
- Remember! Condoms do not offer 100 per cent protection from STDs and unwanted pregnancy. It will not consistently prevent transmission of STDs passed through skin-to-skin contact – for example, syphilis, human papilloma virus (warts) and herpes. However, if used properly, they are very effective and can reduce the risk of transmission of these STDs.

Putting on a male condom

- Take the condom carefully out of the packet.
- Place the condom on the tip of the penis when it is hard and erect, but before it touches the partner's body. Make sure that the rolled-up condom rim faces outward.
- With the other hand, pinch the tip of the condom to remove any trapped air, and unroll the condom to the base of the erect penis.

- After intercourse and before the penis becomes soft, withdraw the penis carefully, holding the rim of the condom against the penis, so that semen does not spill out.
- Slide the condom gently off the penis, and knot the open end.
- After using the condom, throw it in the garbage.

Putting on a female condom

- A condom can be inserted up to eight hours before sexual intercourse.
- Open the package carefully. Hold the small ring at the closed end of the condom between the thumb and middle finger.
- Find a comfortable position, either lying down, sitting with your knees apart or standing with one foot raised on a stool, squeeze the small ring and insert it into the vagina as far as you can.
- Put a finger inside the condom and push the small ring inside as far as possible. It is also possible to insert the condom by putting it onto the erect penis before intercourse.
- Make sure that the part of the condom with the outer ring is outside the body. The outer ring will lie flat against the body when the penis is inside the condom.
- When the penis enters the vagina, make sure that the penis is inside the condom.
- Immediately after sexual intercourse, remove the condom by gently twisting the outer ring and pulling the condom out, making sure that no semen is spilt and throw it in the garbage.



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