



GENITAL WARTS

What are genital warts?

Genital warts are lesions that are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV).

What is HPV?

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is an extremely common virus with over 100 strains or types. HPV is the most common sexually transmitted and blood borne infection (STBBI) in Canada. Up to 75 per cent of people will come in contact with this virus during their life. Many people are able to clear the infection within two years.

How is it transmitted?

HPV is transmitted by skin-to skin contact, often through sexual contact.

What are the symptoms?

There are usually no symptoms and people do not know they have HPV. If symptoms develop, it may take two to three months, or even years, for them to appear.

HPV can cause warts in the genital area. They can look like common skin warts, and usually appear as soft or hard skin bumps. The warts often have a cauliflower-like appearance and may range in colour from pink, flesh-colour, white, brown or grey. They can be raised or flat, single or multiple.

How do I get tested?

There is currently no routine diagnostic test for HPV in Canada. A health care practitioner can examine your skin for genital warts.

How is it treated?

Treatments are available to remove warts and may reduce the risk of transmission to sexual partners. Several treatments may be required before all the warts are gone. Treatments used may vary depending on the number and location of the warts.

Some common treatments available include:

- Cryotherapy, a procedure which freezes the warts with liquid nitrogen
- Topical medications (e.g. Podophyllin) applied directly to the warts.
- Home treatments are available by prescription (e.g. Aldara, Vyloma, Condyline)
- Laser treatment or minor surgery, which are often used to treat the cervix or other internal warts.

Over-the-counter wart treatments should never be used in the genital area.

How is it prevented?

Condoms can help prevent the spread of HPV, but they do not provide full protection. An HPV vaccine is also available to protect against the most common strains of HPV. This vaccine is being given to students in grade 7 in Ontario schools and persons assigned male at birth 9 to 26 years old (who meet high risk eligibility criteria), who are

immunocompromised or immunocompetent HIV infected. In some circumstances, this vaccine may also be prescribed for adults who did not receive the vaccine in school. Discuss with your health care provider if this vaccine is appropriate for you.

Possible complications:

Some types of HPV can cause cancer of the cervix, as well as other rare cancers of the penis, vulva, anus or throat. HPV types that cause genital warts are unlikely to cause cancer.

Remember:

Any infection in the genital area may increase the risk of becoming infected with HIV. Practicing safer sex, by using latex or polyurethane condoms and/or oral dams for oral, anal or vaginal sex can reduce the risk of STIs.

Call the **Sexual Health Infoline Ontario** at 1-800-668-2437 if you have questions or need help.

For more information:

www.sexandu.ca

Sexual Health Centre

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