

For Teens: What You Should Know About Genital Warts



Genital warts are spread by skin-to-skin contact, mainly during sex. Genital warts are caused by a virus called human papillomavirus (HPV). It's spread through contact with genital skin or mucosal areas and secretions, and sores (ulcers) of an infected person. The warts can be visible bumps or you may not be able to see them at all. The warts grow in or around the sex organs and anus, and sometimes the mouth. Some people have no symptoms. Other people have itching, pain, or bleeding. Genital warts are also called condyloma.

A health danger

Be aware of the following:

- Warts you can see can be treated. But the virus never goes away.
- Home treatments don't cure warts.
- If you have genital warts, you probably have HPV infection. Over time, this virus can lead to cancer in both men and women.
- A baby can get genital warts from an infected mother during birth.

Know the risks

Here are the facts:

- Having many sex partners puts you at risk for getting genital warts.
- Having sex without a condom makes it easier to get warts. However, you can still catch HPV even when using a condom.
- The best way to prevent this disease is not to have sex.
- If you have sex, be sure you and your partner are looked at by a healthcare provider. You and your partner should also be tested for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Also be sure you use latex condoms.
- If you or your partner has this disease, get treatment for all warts you can see. Don't have sex during treatment. After warts have been treated, use latex condoms.

Talk to your partner

It may be hard to talk about this with your partner, but it can help keep you and your partner safe. Ask yourself and your partner these questions:

"Have you ever had sex with anyone without using a condom?"

"Have you ever had genital warts?"

"Have you ever had a sexually transmitted infection?"

Did you or your partner answer "yes" to any of these questions? If so, you should both get tested for STIs.

Latex condoms may help

Warts can form in places a condom doesn't cover. This means condoms can't totally protect you. But they can help.

- Use latex male condoms or female condoms.
- Keep latex condoms on hand. Store them in a cool place. Don't keep them in your wallet or car.
- If you use a lubricant, make sure it's water-based. Don't use petroleum jelly, oils, or hand creams. These can make the condom break.

HPV vaccine to prevent genital warts

A vaccine is available that helps protect against HPV, the virus that causes genital warts. It's recommended for both males and females. Your healthcare provider can tell you more.

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