

## Genital Warts (Condyloma)



Genital warts (condyloma) are caused by a virus that is usually spread sexually. This virus is known as HPV (human papillomavirus). The warts are sometimes tiny or in parts of the body that are hard to see. But genital warts can cause big trouble, especially in women. HPV infection can cause cell changes that can lead to cervical, penile, or anal cancer. Warts can even be passed to babies during childbirth.

Female and male latex condoms may help protect against genital warts. But condoms don't cover all the areas that can get infected. That means condoms may not protect you completely.

### What are the symptoms of genital warts?

Genital warts can be flat. Or they can be raised and look like tiny cauliflowers. They can grow on the penis, vagina, or cervix. They can also grow in and around the rectum, and even in the mouth or throat. You can have the virus for many months or even years before the warts appear. Or you may have the virus but never get visible warts. Once warts form, they might be too small to be seen. That's why you need regular exams by your healthcare provider. They can find tiny warts and test for HPV infection. Your provider can also check your cells for changes that also show that the virus is present.

### What is the treatment of genital warts?

Genital warts tend to grow with time. The smaller the warts are, the easier they are to remove. So don't delay. Warts are most often removed with medicine. Sometimes they're frozen off with liquid nitrogen. Warts may also be removed with heat, laser, or surgery. More than one treatment may be needed. Never try to treat genital warts yourself. Often warts need to be treated a few times, as they tend to come back.

### How are genital warts prevented?



To prevent genital warts, get vaccinated against HPV. The HPV vaccine is advised for all girls and boys during the early teen years. The vaccine is especially helpful if given early and before starting to have sex. But it can be effective even if given later. It's approved for use up to age 45.

It's also important to know your partner's sexual history. Someone may not have visible warts. But they can still spread the virus. Protect yourself by using latex condoms. And get regular health exams. If you go to a new healthcare provider, be certain to provide your HPV history so that adequate screening and follow-up can be provided. In women, regular Pap tests with HPV testing can help find changes caused by the virus and catch any early signs of cervical cancer.

## **For more information**

American Sexual Health Association STD/STI Hotline, 919-361-8488, [www.ashastd.org](http://www.ashastd.org)

CDC, 800-232-4636, [www.cdc.gov/std](http://www.cdc.gov/std)

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