

Genital Warts (HPV Infection)

Genital warts are skin-colored, cauliflower-like, painless growths. They are caused by the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). These warts can be flat and hard to see without special tests. They can cause itching and irritation.

In males, they can occur on the penis or around the rectum. In females, they can occur around the opening to the vagina, on the cervix (opening of the womb) or around the rectum. The warts often occur along with other vaginal infections. They can grow rapidly, especially where there is heavy sweating or moisture. They may also grow faster during pregnancy.

Genital warts are usually spread by sexual contact. They are the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a virus. During pregnancy or delivery the HPV virus can be passed on to the baby from an infected mother. This is why all sexually active females should be checked, even if they cannot see any warts.

Your doctor will talk to you about how often to have a Pap test. Typically, your first Pap will be at age 21 and every three years thereafter.

Diagnosis

Some warts are big enough to see or are in areas that you can see. Most warts are diagnosed by a doctor during an examination. Some warts are the flat type found by a Pap test of the cervix. HPV on a Pap test only means that the virus has been detected. It does not always mean you have warts.

If the HPV virus was found with a Pap smear, we will schedule you for a colposcopy (kole POSS koe pee). The colposcope magnifies the cervix and lets the doctor look for any abnormal areas. See Helping Hand HH-III-83, *Colposcopy – Directed Biopsy*.

Treatment

There are several treatments for warts. Your doctor may treat warts in the clinic with a medicine called TCA (trichloroacetic acid) to treat the warts. Another treatment is a cream called imiquimod (Aldara®). If there are many warts, they may need to be removed by surgery or with a laser. We will refer you to a doctor who does this procedure.

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Treatment, *continued*

- The TCA medicine does not need to be washed off until you shower (unless you have pain or stinging).
- Do not have sexual intercourse until your doctor says it is okay. Then a condom should be used. Sex partners may need to be treated also.

NOTE: Special care is needed when treating pregnant females. Please tell your doctor if there is any chance you may be pregnant. The doctor may want to freeze the warts or remove them surgically.

Where to Get Treatment

If you live in the Columbus area, your partner(s) can be treated at the Columbus Public Health Department at 240 Parsons Avenue, 2 blocks North of Nationwide Children's Hospital. The phone number is (614) 645-7772.

If you live outside the Columbus area, call your local health department.

Prevention of Future Infection

Not having intercourse is the only 100% sure way to prevent genital warts, other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV (the virus that causes AIDS).

If you choose to have sex, you can do some things that might help prevent the spread of HPV and other STIs:

- Respect yourself and your partner.
- Limit the number of sexual partners.
- Know your partner and his or her sexual history.
- Always use a condom. Use it correctly. Use a condom every time you have sex.
- Be prepared. Have another condom ready in case the one you are using breaks.
- Avoid alcohol and other drugs. You can't make good choices if you are drunk or stoned.
- Be tested for STIs at least once a year, even if there are no symptoms. Females should have yearly Pap tests. Males should have yearly urine tests.
- Some STIs make it easier for HIV to enter the skin or mucous membranes. If you get more than one STI infection, you should be tested for HIV.
- There is a vaccine that may help protect against HPV. It is recommended that both boys and girls have the vaccine series at age 11.

Caring for Babies and Young Children

Wear gloves when changing diapers or bathing children to keep from spreading the HPV infection to their skin.

If you care for babies or children with HPV, read Helping Hand HH-I-398, *Genital Warts in Babies and Children*. If a doctor prescribes TCA for the children, apply the medicine to the warts again each time you clean the diaper area, and after you bathe them. Always wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds before and after applying the medicine, diapering, or changing their clothes.

More Information

For more facts about HPV and other STIs call the National Hotline at 1-800-227-8922 (8:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. Monday through Friday).

If you have any questions, be sure to ask your doctor or nurse, or call the Adolescent Health Center at (614) 722-2450.