

Genital Warts/HPV

(caused by human papillomavirus - HPV)

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Most people have no symptoms
- Develop within weeks or months after exposure, or not at all
- Soft fleshy lumps on or near genitals or anus
- Itching or burning around genitals
- Warts may be hidden in the vagina or anus
- The warts may go away with treatment, but the HPV infection can persist
- In 90% of cases, HPV disappears spontaneously within 2 years after infection

TRANSMISSION

Genital warts are spread by:

- Vaginal sex
- Oral sex (rare)
- Anal sex
- Contact with infected person's warts
- Infected mother to newborn (very rare)
- Warts/HPV may be spread even if no warts are visible because the virus may be present on areas not protected by a condom

COMPLICATIONS

If left untreated, genital warts can:

- Spread to sex partners
- Be passed to newborn during childbirth; can cause warts in infant's throat (very rare)

Some virus strains lead to abnormal Pap tests and increased risk of cervical cancer, but these strains do not cause visible warts. Sexually active women should have yearly Pap tests starting 3 years after they first had sex. HPV may also play a role in cancers of the anus, mouth/throat, penis, and vagina.

A physician may perform a special test to identify the cancer-associated strains.

PREVENTION

- Two vaccines are now available for females 9-26 years of age to protect against the types of HPV that cause most cases of genital warts and cervical cancer.
- One vaccine is available for males 9-26 years of age for protection against most genital warts.
- Avoiding vaginal, oral or anal sex is the best way to prevent STDs.
- Latex condoms, when used consistently and correctly, can reduce the risk of HPV infection only when the infected areas are covered by the condom. Using condoms may also help protect against HPV-related diseases such as cervical cancer.
- Always use latex condoms during vaginal/anal sex.
- Use a latex condom for oral sex on penis.
- Use a latex barrier (dental dam or condom cut in half) for oral sex on a vagina or anus.
- Limit the number of sex partners.

TESTING AND TREATMENT

- Get an exam from a medical provider if infection is suspected.
- Warts can be treated, but HPV cannot be cured.
- HPV requires medical treatment by doctor.
- Drugstore treatment for other kinds of warts may be harmful if used on genital warts.

“High risk” HPV strains that cause cancer do not cause visible genital warts. But, high-risk strains may be present along with visible warts.

The body may eventually clear the virus with or without treatment.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT:

Minnesota Department of Health
 STD and HIV Section
 (651) 201-5414; (651) 201-5797 TTY
www.health.state.mn.us/std

Minnesota Family Planning and STD Hotline
 1-800-783-2287 Voice/TTY; (651) 645-9360 (Metro)
www.sexualhealthmn.org

American Social Health Association (ASHA)
www.ashastd.org

CDC National STD and AIDS Hotlines
 1-800-CDC-INFO; 1-888-232-6348 TTY
www.cdc.gov/std

