

WHAT ARE

Genital Warts?

**Identifying, treating
and preventing this
sexually transmitted
infection**

What are genital warts?

Genital warts are small warty lumps that grow in and around the genital skin (vagina, penis or testicles) and the anus.

Genital warts are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV), a common sexually transmitted infection (STI). Most sexually active people carry HPV at some stage in their lives, but they usually don't have any symptoms (that is, they don't have warts).

HPV, genital warts and cancer

There are many types of HPV. Some HPVs can cause cancer, including cervical cancer in women. The HPVs that cause genital warts rarely cause cancer. Women with genital warts are not at a greater risk of getting cervical cancer, but they should still have regular cervical smears.

How genital warts are spread

You can get genital warts by having sexual contact with someone who has HPV. This includes having skin contact with their genital or anal skin or by having vaginal, anal or oral sex.

In rare cases, a mother may pass the virus to her baby during childbirth. If you are pregnant, talk to your doctor or midwife.

You may have HPV but have no warts. This means that you could pass the virus to your partner(s) without knowing it.

Signs and symptoms

Genital warts look like warts that appear on other parts of the body. The warts may be raised or flat, small or large, and there may be one wart or many warts.

Warts can appear on or around the genitals, around the anus or on the groin or thighs. In rare cases, warts can appear in the mouth.

What if I have genital warts?

If you have genital warts, visit your doctor, your student health or youth clinic or a Sexual Health Services or Family Planning clinic. They will look at the affected area to confirm if you have genital warts and discuss treatment if it's needed.

Treating genital warts

Genital warts can be treated, but the infection can't be cured.

The symptoms of genital warts can come and go. Different treatments are available, and the doctor or nurse will discuss which is best for you.

Treatments include:

- skin paint or cream
- freezing the warts
- surgical removal (cutting off the warts).

If you are pregnant, or think you might be, tell the doctor or nurse. They will choose a treatment that won't affect your baby.

After treatment:

- keep the treated area clean and dry
- bathe once a day in salty water (dry the treated area gently and thoroughly)
- protect the treated area by avoiding sexual contact.

You may need several treatments to remove the warts. Because the infection can't be cured, the warts may come back in the future.

Should I tell my partner(s)?

Yes. You may have infected your partner(s), or they may have infected you without knowing it. They may have developed genital warts and need treatment. Even when you have no warts, you can still pass on the virus.

If you need help to tell your partner(s), you could speak to a doctor, nurse or sexual health counsellor or call the free HPV helpline (0508 111 213). You could also show your partner(s) this pamphlet.

Protecting yourself and others

Get vaccinated. There is a vaccine that protects against the nine types of HPV viruses that cause most genital warts and HPV cancers. It is free for young people aged 9 to 26 inclusive. It prevents infection, but does not treat existing infections, so it is most effective before a person is sexually active. However, if you're already having sex, it can protect you against any of the HPV types you may not have already been exposed to.

Use a condom. Using a condom every time you have sex reduces your risk of getting genital warts and other STIs. Although using a condom will give some protection, the virus can be passed on to any area not covered by a condom or where the skin comes into contact with warts. (See the next section for how to use a condom.)

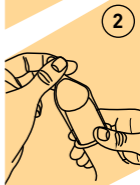
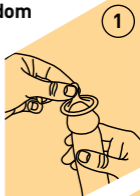
You can get condoms on prescription from your doctor, or you can get them free from Sexual Health Services and Family Planning clinics. You can also buy condoms from pharmacies, supermarkets, pubs, clubs and some dairies.

Have a sexual health check, especially if you think you have genital warts or another STI. You can get checked at your doctor's, at some student health and youth clinics and at Sexual Health Services and Family Planning clinics.

How to use a condom

To help protect against genital warts and other STIs, cover the penis with the condom **before** it touches the partner's vagina, mouth or anus. **Use a new and lubricated condom each time you have sex.**

- Check the expiry date on the condom packet. If this date has passed, throw the condom away and use one that hasn't expired.
- Open the packet carefully. Fingernails, rings and teeth can tear the condom.
- Before the condom comes into contact with the penis, check that the condom is the right way up (figure 1). Do this by pinching the top of the condom and rolling it down a little. It's the right way up if it rolls down easily (figure 2).
- Continue pinching the top of the condom and roll it onto the hard penis, all the way down to the base (figure 3).
- Apply a water-based lubricant (eg, KY Jelly, Wet Stuff, Sylk or Top Gel) to the condom (figure 4). Oil-based lubricants such as Vaseline can damage condoms.
- After ejaculating (cumming) and when withdrawing, prevent semen from being spilt by holding the condom onto the base of the penis. Remove the used condom from the penis and wrap it in tissue or toilet paper. Put it in the rubbish.



More information

You can get more information about genital warts and other STIs from:

- your doctor or nurse
- the public health nurse at your school
- Student Health Services at your university, polytechnic or school
- youth health clinics in your area
- Sexual Health Services – for clinics in your area, visit www.nzshs.org/clinics
- Family Planning - for clinics in your area, call (free) 0800 INFOLINE (0800 4636 5463) or visit www.familyplanning.org.nz
- NZ HPV Project at www.hpv.org.nz, or call the Herpes/HIV Helpline (tollfree 0508 11 12 13 or (09) 433 6526 if calling from a mobile)
- Ministry of Health HPV vaccine page – visit <http://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/immunisation/immunisation-older-children>
- Just the Facts website, visit www.justthefacts.co.nz

Read the following leaflets (available from your health provider and the HealthEd website www.healthed.govt.nz):

- *What is Gonorrhoea?* Code HE1442
- *What is Genital Herpes?* Code HE1443
- *Should I Have a Sexual Health Check?* Code HE1445
- *A Compact Guide to Sexual Health.* Code HE1438

Remember

Genital warts are small warty lumps that grow in and around the genital skin and anus. In rare cases, they may appear in the mouth.

Genital warts are caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV), a common sexually transmitted infection. Most sexually active people carry HPV at some stage in their lives, but they usually don't have warts.

If you have genital warts, visit your doctor, your student health or youth clinic or a Sexual Health Services or Family Planning clinic.

Genital warts can be treated, but the infection can't be cured. You may need several treatments to remove the warts.

There is a vaccine that helps to protect against the HPVs that cause most genital warts, and for women, most cervical cancers.

To help protect against genital warts, always use a condom when having sex.

This resource is based on information from the New Zealand Sexual Health Society's *Genital Warts Patient Information Leaflet*, September 2017, available at www.nzshs.org

Te Whatu Ora
Health New Zealand



Te Kāwanatanga o Aotearoa
New Zealand Government

This resource is available from www.healthed.govt.nz or your local authorised provider.

Revised October 2022. Code HE1444.