

Condyloma or Venereal Warts

Condyloma, or venereal warts, are one of most common sexually transmitted diseases in the United States. They often appear as "tiny bumps" in the genital area. Like the warts on any part of your body, they are caused by a virus. The virus that causes condyloma is called the human papilloma virus (HPV). These warts are contagious and are easily passed from one person to another during sex. It is estimated that more than 65% of people who have sex with a person who has condyloma will also develop warts. Do not be afraid to show affection for family and friends, however, because these warts are not "caught" by nonsexual activities, such as kissing and hugging.

Once you are infected with the virus, it may take anywhere from one to four months for the warts to develop, but some cases have taken much longer to develop, possibly years. You can have genital warts anywhere on or around the vulva, around the opening or inside the vagina, on the cervix and around the anus. In men, warts can be found on the penis, in the opening of the penis, scrotum and anus.

Very often warts cause no symptoms. When warts do appear, they may cause itching, irritation or some bleeding. The warts may appear as small pink or skin colored bumps. They can grow very rapidly, spread, and may begin to look like cauliflower as they grow. Venereal warts can be very hard to detect. Any growth on or around your genital area should be checked by a physician. If a woman or man develops genital warts, it may be necessary for their sexual partners to be examined for warts.

The human papilloma virus has been linked to cancer. A woman with untreated venereal warts may increase her risk of cervical cancer. Evidence also suggests that genital warts may be linked to cancer of the penis. The chances are that your condyloma will not develop into cancer. If you have your warts removed and follow your physician's advice, the warts can usually be treated and are only a temporary problem.

If you have condyloma, there are now several simple, relatively painless procedures used to treat warts. Your physician will recommend the best treatment for you.

Topical medications are the most common treatment for warts outside of your body. This medication is applied to the warts by your physician, though a prescription can be given for this medication and used at home as directed. You should never try to treat the warts with over-the-counter medications.

Cryotherapy is treatment often used for warts growing on the cervix. This treatment freezes the warts. It takes around ten minutes and is done in the office. It may cause mild cramping and burning that should disappear quickly.

Laser surgery uses a beam of light to burn the warts off. You would receive a mild sedative and local anesthetic for this procedure. It does not require an overnight stay in the hospital.

Cone biopsies are used to remove the surface of the cervix. This is performed with a knife or laser. An electrosurgical loop excision may also accomplish this procedure. This is done in the hospital while you are asleep. You usually go home the same day.

These treatments all destroy warts that are seen at the time, but the virus can be in normal-looking skin. Even though condyloma are treated, we never say the HPV infection is gone. Sometimes new warts develop weeks or months later, if your partner has visible warts or if yours persist, you might want to have your partner examined by a dermatologist or urologist.

If your pap was abnormal, this should be repeated every three to four months after treatment. If you exams come back normal after the first year, then you can begin getting yearly pap smears again. If you notice any new warts develop, call your doctor. Condyloma can be treated, but you must watch for new warts.

Since genital warts are sexually transmitted, you can help yourself avoid getting them again if you and your sexual partner follow safe sex habits. A condom will help prevent infection with the virus, but is not 100% effective. If you are starting a new relationship, choose your partner wisely and talk about your sexual histories. If you suspect someone has genital warts, you should not have sex with him (her) until you know he (she) has been examined and treated.