



Patient Information

Human Papillomavirus And You

As many as 75% of sexually active adults will contract genital human papillomavirus (HPV) at some point in their lives, yet many are unaware of what HPV is and how this sexually transmitted disease is spread. Are you one of them? Read on for a better understanding of HPV and its transmission.

Fast Facts: What is HPV?

- HPV is one of the most common sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). About 20 million people are infected with HPV in the United States, with 5.5 million new infections every year.
- HPV is one of the most common viral STDs among college students, and it seems to be prevalent in women in their 20s.
- More than 100 types of HPV have been identified, most of which are harmless.
- Thirty types are spread through sexual contact and affect the genital area. Of these 30 types, some cause genital warts while others cause subclinical infections that are invisible, with no obvious signs and symptoms. One prominent study reported that almost half of women infected with HPV had no noticeable symptoms.
- Genital warts are common and can be treated.

The Most Noticeable Symptom

Genital warts are the most easily recognized sign of genital HPV infection. Two-thirds of people who have sexual contact through either oral, genital or anal sex with an infected partner will develop warts. However, many people have a genital HPV infection without genital warts. (HPV can also cause skin warts on the hands and soles of the feet.)

Warts may develop outside and inside the vagina, on the cervix or around the anus. In men, genital warts are less common. When they do occur, they surface on the tip and shaft of the penis, on the scrotum or around the anus.

Genital warts often occur in clusters and can be very tiny or can spread into large masses in the genital or anal area. Your NP can diagnose genital warts by sight, and women with genital warts should be examined for possible HPV infection of the cervix. Also, an abnormal Pap smear result could indicate HPV infection.

Treating HPV

Genital warts often disappear without treatment, but some eventually may develop a fleshy, small, raised growth resembling cauliflower. Whether warts grow or disappear is entirely unpredictable. So if you suspect you have genital warts, you should be examined and treated if necessary.

Treatment depends on the size and location of the warts. Your NP will decide which of the following treatments is best:

- Imiquimod (Aldara)
- Podophyllin (Podocon-25)
- Podofilox (Condylox)
- Fluorouracil (Fluoroplex, Efudex)
- Trichloroacetic acid
- Cryosurgery (freezing), electrocautery (burning) or laser treatment may be used if the warts are small.
- Alpha interferon can be injected directly into warts that have returned after being removed by traditional means, but it is expensive and does not reduce the chance of recurring warts.
- Surgical excision may be performed to remove large warts that have not responded to any other treatment.

Although treatments can get rid of the warts, none can get rid of the virus that causes them. Because the virus is still present in your body, warts often come back after treatment.

Preventing HPV

The only sure way to prevent an HPV infection is to avoid direct contact with the virus. If you or your sexual partner has visible warts in the genital area, avoid any sexual contact until the warts are treated. Condoms do not prevent HPV transmission.

Complications

Some types of HPV can cause cervical cancer. Others are associated with vulvar and anal cancer and cancer of the penis, which is rare. Most HPV infections do not progress to cervical cancer.

If you would like to learn more, talk to your nurse practitioner.

Adapted from information from the National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health.

Additional Notes:

