



## Factsheet: Genital Warts

### What are Genital Warts?

Genital Warts is a virus, which is caused by certain strains of the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). It is a very common STI.

### How is it transmitted?

- Unprotected anal and vaginal sex (and sometimes oral sex, though rare).
- Intimate/close genital and skin to skin contact. (Note: the exchange of body fluids does not need to occur).
- Mother to Child transmission may occur (during childbirth) if the mother's infection is active.

### What are the symptoms?

A person can have the Genital Warts Virus and not have any symptoms.

Most people will not be aware that they have the genital warts virus (HPV). It can be passed unknowingly from one partner to another. In some cases it may take up to a year for warts to appear.

Symptoms can include:

- Painless fleshy lumps around the vagina, penis, anus, scrotum, tops of the legs, bum cheeks (anywhere on the genital area).
- The warts can be raised or flat, single or multiple, or appear in clusters. They can be small or large.
- Warts can clear up by themselves without treatment, but the virus will still be present, and it can still be passed on.
- Symptoms can re-occur, and this varies from person to person.

### How is it diagnosed?

A visual examination of the genital area by a nurse or doctor.

*[Note: A person may not have visible warts, but can still have the virus, and it can still be passed to sexual partner(s)].*

### How are they treated?

There is no cure for the virus that causes genital warts, however, in general most people with a healthy immune system clear or suppress the virus over time. If visible warts are present, the aim of the treatment is to remove them. This can be done in a variety of ways, and will depend on the size, location and number of warts:

- Lotion/ointment by prescription.
- Freezing/burning off.
- Laser treatment.



**IMPORTANT: Over-the-counter wart treatments should not be used in the genital area.**

### Prevention

- If a person has visible symptoms of genital warts, he/she should not engage in sexual activity until the warts are removed/cleared up.
- Although condoms do not provide complete protection against genital warts, sexually active people should always use condoms and/or dental dams for vaginal, anal and oral sex.
- If symptoms are visible, get checked and treated.
- Do not share sex toys, [or if toys are shared, use condoms on the sex toy, change the condom between people, remove it after use, and thoroughly clean the toy before using it again].
- Make informed decisions: talk to sexual partner(s) about STI testing and using condoms, and get informed about the risks.
- Mutual monogamy (both partners test for STIs and don't have any, and both partners agree to only have sex with each other, and keep it that way!).

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