

Genitourinary Medicine

Genital Warts

Information for patients



What are genital warts?

Genital warts are small fleshy growths which can appear anywhere on the genital area in men and women.

What causes warts?

Warts are caused by a virus called Human Papilloma Virus (HPV).

How did I get them?

They are passed on through sex or sexual contact. It is possible for a sexual partner to carry the wart virus but not get warts that you can see. People who are diagnosed with genital warts often do not know where, when or from whom they have caught the virus.

When did I get them?

The incubation period (i.e. the time it takes from catching the virus to getting visible warts) is very variable. Some people develop warts within a month of being exposed to the virus; for other people it takes longer to develop warts, possibly even years. Some people carry the virus but never get any warts that you can see.

What do they look like?

Warts vary in shape, size and quantity. They can feel soft, hard or rough and can be large or small. They also vary in colour. Sometimes people are very aware of their warts and sometimes they are tucked away where it is harder for you to see or feel them. It can be helpful for you to know where your warts are and what they are like so you know if they are getting better with the treatment.

How are they treated?

We use different treatments depending on the appearance and size of the warts. We either freeze the warts or use chemical treatments; we often use a combination of treatments. We try to treat the warts once a week.

We can sometimes prescribe you some treatment to use at home.

Never use an “over the counter” treatment for warts as these are not designed to treat genital warts and can cause severe irritation.

We often use a treatment called **podophyllin**. The first time it is used we ask you to **wash it off in 4 hours**. The nurse or doctor will tell you if you have had this treatment.

How many treatments do I need?

It is very difficult to tell someone the number of treatments that they will need as everyone responds differently. In our experience most people get rid of the warts after 2-3 treatments.

A few people have warts that respond slowly and quite commonly warts come back even if they have responded quickly. The treatment aims to get rid of the overgrowth of skin caused by the virus i.e. the wart itself, but does not get rid of the virus. The virus goes on living inside your skin – this is why warts often return after they have been removed, so you may need to have them treated again. Eventually your immune system will clear the virus, but this may take months/years.

Does the treatment have any side effects?

With any of the treatments there is a chance that the skin can feel sore. If this happens, bathing the area in salt water can help. Either use 1 teaspoon of salt (just ordinary cooking or table salt) to a pint of water or add a small cup of salt to the bath, no more than twice a day. Do not apply antiseptic creams or other preparations.

Avoid using perfumed soaps or toiletries. We also recommend that you take painkillers if you are uncomfortable.

What about sex?

If you are in a new relationship then we recommend that you use condoms until your warts have gone. If you are in a long-term relationship there is no reason to start using condoms. Please ask a nurse if you would like some condoms.

Does my partner need to be checked?

It is a good idea for your sexual partners to be examined. It is important that female sexual partners are up-to-date with their cervical smears.

What about wart virus and smear tests for women?

You do not need more frequent smear tests after getting warts unless you have an abnormal smear. Sometimes the smear test result may be reported as showing 'wart virus changes'. This can happen when warts are visible on the cervix, but more commonly occurs when the wart virus is present but you cannot see any warts.

Some women who have had wart virus changes on a smear do get visible warts at a later date, but it seems that most do not. Wart virus changes on a smear test do not need treating and will usually get better with time.

If your smear test result is normal you will need a smear every 3 years.

If wart virus changes are found then you will need an earlier repeat smear. Your doctor or nurse will tell you when this should be done. Please make a note in your diary to remind yourself when it is due.

What do I do if my warts come back?

If your warts return within 3 months then you can book an appointment to see the nurse. Otherwise please make an appointment to see the doctor.

How to contact us

If you are very sore or uncomfortable after any treatment or have any questions then please telephone and ask to speak to a Nurse. If you need to book an appointment to see a Doctor or Nurse, please telephone the Clinic.

For all enquiries or appointments:

For Oxford Tel: 01865 231231

For Banbury Tel: 01295 819181

Further information

<http://www.sexualhealthoxfordshire.nhs.uk>

http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/genital_warts/Pages/Introduction.aspx

If you need an interpreter or need a document in another language, large print, Braille or audio version, please call **01865 221473** or email **PALSJR@orh.nhs.uk**

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