



# UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND UNIVERSITY HEALTH CENTER

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## Human Papilloma Virus Infection (HPV/Genital Warts)

Genital warts, medically referred to as condylomata acuminata, occur in the genital area. These warts are caused by a virus (Human Papilloma Virus) similar to the virus of common skin warts. The warts are usually transmitted by sexual contact, and may be seen in only one partner. After exposure, it may take from 1 to 20 months for the warts to appear, although the usual time is within 4 months. There have been some cases where it has taken years for warts to appear. Over 100 different types of the HPV have been identified, with about 30 of these types primarily infecting the genital area and causing warts.

### Symptoms

Genital warts are often first noticed as a firm painless tissue on the vulva, penis or area around the rectum. These warts are flesh-colored, lumps which may be single or in groups. They may look like a tiny cauliflower or be flat.

### Treatment

- Treatment of most warts is relatively painless and simple. In office treatments, Trichloroacetic acid or bichloroacetic acid, both clear liquids, or Podophyllin, a dark brown solution, can be carefully painted on each wart. Podophyllin needs to be washed off after a specified period of time (your practitioner will advise you). Podophyllin can cause severe burning if left on too long. Podophyllin must not be used in pregnancy. Tell your practitioner if you might be pregnant.
- Patient applied treatments are now available by prescription. Podofilox solution or gel and Imiquimod Cream are safe and easy to use. All of the available treatments are equally effective.
- Warts sometimes disappear after only one treatment, however, weekly treatments are frequently necessary for 3 to 4 weeks or longer.

- Very large warts or warts in sensitive locations such as inside the vagina or urethra may require referral for different treatments. These treatment options can be discussed with your practitioner.
- Keep the area being treated clean and dry.
- Avoid irritation from tight clothing.
- In resistant cases, cryotherapy (freezing) may be used.

### Important:

1. Tell your sexual partner(s) they need a check-up, even if they haven't noticed any symptoms.
2. Condoms should be used until all warts have disappeared and both partners have been treated.
3. To reduce the risk of any potential recurrence, many experts are recommending the use of condoms with all sexual activity for at least 6 months after the warts have disappeared.
4. Since the advent of HIV/AIDS, anal intercourse is considered a high risk activity even with condom use. If you do participate in anal intercourse, use a different condom for rectal and vaginal penetration.
5. Remember: Safer sex practices reduce the risk of contracting HPV and all other sexually transmitted diseases (STD's).
6. Researchers are finding a link between cervical cancer and infection with certain strains of wart HPV. The best defense against cancer is early detection and treatment. Women should get regular Pap smears at least once a year or more often if recommended by their practitioners.

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**Published for the University of Maryland community.**

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