



## What are genital warts?

Genital warts are one of the most common types of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).<sup>1</sup> In 90% of cases, genital warts are caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV) types 6 or 11.<sup>2</sup> Genital warts may look like small, flesh-colored bumps and in many cases are too small to be visible.<sup>1</sup> Genital warts are usually asymptomatic, but depending on the size and location they can be painful or itchy.<sup>2</sup> Women are more likely than men to develop genital warts.<sup>1</sup>

## Testing

Because genital warts are often hard to detect, a doctor may apply a mild solution to your genitals to whiten any warts.<sup>4</sup>

- For **women**, it is important to have regular pelvic exams and Pap tests to help detect vaginal or cervical changes caused by genital warts.<sup>4</sup>

## Treatment

The primary reason for treating genital warts is to relieve any symptoms and cosmetic concerns.<sup>2</sup> If genital warts are left untreated, visible genital warts can resolve on their own, remain unchanged, or increase in size or number.<sup>2</sup> Treatment for genital warts does not completely get rid of the genital HPV infection.<sup>2</sup>

## Fast facts

- 90% of genital warts are caused by the human papilloma virus (HPV).<sup>2</sup>
- Genital warts do not always have signs or symptoms, but depending on size and location they can be painful.<sup>2</sup>
- For women, regular pelvic exams and Pap tests are important in the detection of genital warts.<sup>4</sup>
- Cervical cancer and problems during childbirth are complications of genital warts.<sup>3</sup>
- Treatment for genital warts is typically to relieve symptoms and for cosmetic concerns; it does not completely get rid of the genital HPV infection.<sup>2</sup>

## References

1. Mayo Clinic <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/genital-warts/home/ovc-20265468>.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <https://www.cdc.gov/std/treatment/2010/genital-warts.htm>.
3. Mayo Clinic <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/genital-warts/symptoms-causes/dxc-20265518>.
4. Mayo Clinic <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/genital-warts/diagnosis-treatment/diagnosis/dxc-20265528>.

## Transmission

Genital warts are caused by HPV. Genital HPV is spread through sexual contact, and in most cases, your immune system kills genital HPV before signs or symptoms of genital warts are present.<sup>3</sup>

### Factors that put you at an increased risk of developing genital HPV are<sup>3</sup>:

- Having unprotected sex with multiple partners
- Having had another STD
- Having sex with a partner whose sexual history you aren't aware of
- Becoming sexually active at a young age

## Symptoms

Genital warts typically don't present with symptoms:<sup>2</sup>

- For **women**, genital warts can grow on the vulva, the walls of the vagina, the area between the external genitals and the anus, the anal canal, and the cervix.<sup>3</sup>
- For **men**, genital warts may occur on the tip or shaft of the penis, the scrotum, or the anus.<sup>3</sup>
- Genital warts also can develop in the mouth or throat of a person who has had oral sex with someone infected.<sup>3</sup>

### General signs and symptoms of genital warts include<sup>3</sup>:

- Small, flesh-colored or gray swellings in the genital area
- Several warts close together that take on a cauliflower-like shape
- Itching or discomfort in the genital area
- Bleeding with intercourse

Genital warts usually are diagnosed clinically by visual inspection but can be confirmed with a biopsy.<sup>2</sup>

## Complications

### Genital wart complications may include<sup>3</sup>:

- Cancer. Cervical cancer has been closely linked to genital HPV. This makes it important for women to have regular Pap tests.
- Pregnancy problems. Genital warts may cause problems during pregnancy, such as difficulty urinating, vaginal tissues unable to stretch during childbirth, or vaginal bleeding during birth.