

# Warts

## What causes warts?

Warts are a type of infection caused by viruses in the human papillomavirus (HPV) family. There are more than 100 types of HPV viruses. Warts can grow on all parts of your body. They can grow on your skin, on the inside of your mouth, on your genitals and on your rectal area. Some types of HPV tend to cause warts on the skin, while other HPV types tend to cause warts on the genitals and rectal area. Some people are more naturally resistant to the HPV viruses and don't seem to get warts as easily as other people.

## Can warts be passed from one person to another person?

Yes. Warts on the skin may be passed to another person when that person touches the warts. It is also possible to get warts from using towels or other objects that were used by a person who has warts.

Warts on the genitals are very contagious and can be passed to another person during oral, vaginal or anal sex. It is important not to have unprotected sex if you or your partner has warts on the genital area. In women, warts can grow on the cervix (inside the vagina), and a woman may not know she has them. She may pass the infection to her sexual partner without even knowing it.

## Will warts go away on their own?

Often warts disappear on their own, although it may take many months, or even years, for the warts to go away. But some warts won't go away on their own. Doctors don't know why some warts disappear and others don't.

## Do warts need to be treated?

Generally, yes. Warts are often bothersome. They can bleed and cause pain when they're bumped. They can also be embarrassing, for example, if they grow on your face. Treatment may decrease the chance that the warts will be spread to other areas of your body or to other people.

## How are warts on the skin removed?

First of all, it's important to know that warts on the skin (such as on the fingers, feet and knees) and warts on the genitals are removed in different ways. Don't try any home remedies or over-the-counter drugs to remove warts on the genital area. You could hurt your genital area by putting certain chemicals on it. You also shouldn't treat warts on your face without talking to your doctor first. The following are some

ways to remove warts from the skin:

**Applying salicylic acid--**You can treat warts on places such as the hands, feet or knees by putting salicylic acid (one brand name: Compound W) on the warts. To get good results, you must apply the acid every day for many weeks. After you take a bath or shower, pat your skin dry lightly with a towel. Then put salicylic acid on your warts. The acid sinks in deeper and works better when it is applied to damp skin. Before you take a shower or a bath the next day, use an emery board or pumice stone to file away the dead surface of the warts.

**Duct tape treatment--** Covering a wart with duct tape may also help because it irritates the wart and the skin around it, causing the body to attack it. Cover the wart with duct tape for up to a week. Then remove the tape, soak the wart in water and rub it gently with an emery board or a pumice stone. Leave the tape off overnight, then repeat treatment until the wart goes away. If this is not successful after 2 months, see your doctor to try another approach.

**Applying cantharidin--**Your doctor may use cantharidin on your warts. With this treatment, the doctor "paints" the chemical onto the wart. Most people don't feel any pain when the chemical is applied to the wart. You'll experience some pain and blistering of the wart in about 3 to 8 hours. After treatment with cantharidin, a bandage is put over the wart. The bandage can be removed after 24 hours. When mixtures of cantharidin and other chemicals are used, the bandage is removed after 2 hours. When you see your doctor again, he or she will remove the dead skin of the wart. If the wart isn't gone after one treatment, your doctor may suggest another treatment.

**Applying liquid nitrogen--**Your doctor may use liquid nitrogen to freeze the wart. This treatment is called cryotherapy. Applying liquid nitrogen to the wart causes a little discomfort. To completely remove a wart, liquid nitrogen treatments may be needed every 1 to 3 weeks for a total of 2 to 4 times. If no improvement is noted, your doctor may recommend another type of treatment.

**Other treatments for warts on the skin--**Your doctor can also remove warts on the skin by burning the wart, cutting out the wart or removing the wart with a laser. These treatments are stronger, but they may leave a scar. Ask your doctor about risks and benefits before you decide what kind of treatment to have for your warts.

### How are warts in the genital area treated?

Genital warts must be treated by your doctor. Warts in the genital area can be removed, but there's no cure for the viral infection that causes the warts. This means that the warts may come back even after they have been removed. The following are some ways to treat warts on the genitals:

**Applying liquid nitrogen--**Warts on the genitals may be frozen with liquid

nitrogen (cryotherapy). Your doctor may have to apply the liquid nitrogen at a number of different office visits until the warts are completely gone.

**Chemical treatments**--Warts on the genitals may be treated with special chemicals that dissolve the warts. Some of these chemicals, such as podophyllin (brand names: Podocon-25, Podofin) or trichloroacetic acid (brand name: Tri-Chlor), have to be applied by your doctor. Chemicals such as imiquimod cream (brand name: Aldara), podofilox solution (brand name: Condylox) or fluorouracil cream may be applied at home, according to your doctor's instructions. These treatments may have to be repeated weekly until the warts are gone.

**Loop electrosurgical excision procedure (LEEP)**--With this method for removing genital warts, the doctor passes a sharp instrument shaped like a loop underneath the wart, cutting the wart out of the skin.

**CO2 laser surgery**--For large warts in the genital area, laser surgery may be needed for complete removal.

**Interferon injections**--If genital warts don't go away after they've been treated with different methods, your doctor may try an interferon injection into the warts. Interferon is a chemical that our bodies make. It helps our immune system fight infection. An injection of interferon into the wart may help your body's immune system fight the virus that is causing the wart. Generally, interferon is injected into warts twice a week for up to 8 weeks, or until the warts are gone.

### Do warts ever come back?

Most of the time, treatment of warts on the skin is successful and the warts are gone for good. Your body's immune system can usually get rid of any tiny bits of wart that may be left after a wart has been treated. Genital warts are more likely to come back because there's no cure for the virus that causes them and because warts are more difficult to control in a moist environment. If warts come back, see your doctor to talk about other ways to treat them.

### Special Instructions: