



Genital Warts

What are Genital Warts?

They are called condyloma by medical personnel but are known as "genital" warts. They are caused by a virus, the Human Papillomavirus (HPV); therefore, they are infectious, are a sexually transmitted disease and, like other kind of warts, often recur.

Symptoms

It may take one to three months for symptoms to be noticed, but occasionally it may even be several years after infection. Small pink or red warty growths may occur on the female genitals, the lips, around the urinary opening, the clitoris or on the skin between the vagina and the rectum. They may be on the penis in men. Both men and women may have them around the rectum or within the canal. Women often may have some in the vagina or on the cervix and both may have some in the urinary tract.

Some warts are flat and, though present, may not be noticed by the man or woman at all. These growths may be painless, but often there is itching, burning, mild pain or slight bleeding (especially if vaginal infection is present). They may become worse during a pregnancy or if a vaginal infection (like yeast or Trichomonas) is present.

Diagnosis

The diagnosis is made by examining the genital area. Women need a complete pelvic examination and both men and women should usually have a rectal examination.

Tissue biopsy is not usually necessary, unless the growths fail to respond to treatment.

Furthermore, if growths are in the rectum, urinary tract, vagina, or on the cervix, biopsies are usually necessary.

Additionally, if they involve the vagina or are on the cervix, an examination with a colposcope usually is required—this magnifies the warts to help in the diagnosis. An exam with a colposcope is similar to a regular pelvic exam and is not painful; however, if a tissue biopsy is necessary, this may cause some mild discomfort for a few moments.

Women must have a Pap smear done. Men and women may need tests for gonorrhea, chlamydia and syphilis. These are sexually transmitted diseases that are often associated with genital warts. (Syphilis sometimes causes a warty growth also, so one must be examined to rule it out.)

Risks

There is now information that precancerous tissue changes—dysplasia—may occur in warts which grow on the cervix. Warts on the cervix cause no symptoms, but they may be detected by a Pap smear. This is why it is important to always have a regular Pap smear at least every year and at times more frequently.

Early diagnosis of dysplasia is very important so that treatment can be started before the changes progress to true cancer. A sexual partner(s) may already have or may get warts, too. Anytime a person or their partner(s) thinks they may have genital warts, each should be examined. Male partners with or without evidence of warts should wear a condom until there are not warts evident in either partner.

Prevention

Do not have sex relations with anyone who has genital warts or has recently had treatment for them.

Use a condom, even if you are using another form of birth control. Condoms may provide some protection against other sexually transmitted diseases as well. Finally, always practice good personal hygiene.