

Patients' Guide to Genital Wart Virus

What are genital warts?

Genital wart is one of the most common viral sexually transmitted infections (STI) and is caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV).

There are over 100 types of HPV. Most genital warts are low-risk and unlikely to cause cancer. High-risk types of HPV, e.g. types 16 and 18, may cause cancer in the cervix, genital skin, or anus.

How is HPV passed?

HPV is passed on through sexual contact, such as genital skin-to-skin contact, vaginal, or anal sex. Using condoms during sex may provide protection but it is not 100% effective.

It is **not** common for HPV to be passed from hands to genitals, and from touching inanimate objects like toilet seats or towels.

What are the signs and symptoms?

Not everyone with HPV infection will develop visible warts, which makes it difficult for them to know whether they or their partner(s) have HPV. However, if the warts do appear, they appear as fleshy growths on the skin.

On **women**, the warts may appear on the vulva, vagina, cervix, or anus. On **men**, warts may appear on the penis, urethra, or anus.

When do signs and symptoms appear?

Genital warts may appear 4 weeks or longer after getting infected with HPV.

How are genital warts diagnosed?

- Physical examination for warts
- For women, pap smear tests are conducted to screen for changes in the cervical tissues that could lead to cancer

Who should get tested?

One is encouraged to get tested if one experiences symptoms of an infection or if one's partner(s) have genital warts.

In Singapore, all women who have ever had sex are recommended to have a pap smear every 3 years, starting from the age of 25.

Can genital warts cause other problems?

High-risk types of HPV can cause cancer of the penis, anus, cervix, vulva, or vagina.

How do genital warts affect pregnancy?

Genital warts can increase in number and size during pregnancy. These warts can be treated by freezing or surgery, while chemical treatment should be avoided. Warts tend to go away by themselves after pregnancy.

During birth, HPV can (although rarely) be passed from the mother to the baby. Caesarean section is only recommended if there are very large warts blocking the birth canal.

NOTE: One does not need to avoid getting pregnancy if one has warts or HPV. Most babies of mothers with warts have no related problems. Nonetheless, one must always inform their doctor if they have or have had HPV and/or warts.

Can genital warts be treated?

Treatment of warts is done to clear or remove the warts, but it cannot cure HPV infection. This treatment includes:

- Liquid nitrogen (freezing the warts)
- Topical therapy
- Chemical treatment
- Surgical removal

Can genital warts be treated?

It is possible that even after all the visible warts are gone, some wart virus may still remain in the skin, as ~30% of people experience recurrent warts. However, most HPV infections will clear up on their own within 2-3 years.

NOTE: Smoking may cause the treatment of warts to be less effective, and may even increase the chance of HPV progressing to genital cancer.

Do those with genital warts need to return for follow-up visits?

They may need several treatments before all the warts can be removed. The option of home therapy is also available.

Important Notes on HPV Vaccination

There are safe and effective HPV vaccinations available in Singapore: Gardasil and Cervavix. These vaccines are most effective when given before one becomes sexually active. DSC Clinic only has Gardasil vaccines.

NOTE: These vaccines do not treat existing HPV type infections in patients. Instead, they prevent people from catching HPV types that they have not been infected with.

It is safe to have the HPV vaccine even if one has or has had genital warts.

In Singapore, the HPV vaccines are recommended for females aged 9 to 26. Women above that age may also wish to be vaccinated, but they must discuss their suitability with their doctors. The HPV vaccine is also available for men.

While the vaccine provides a form of protection, vaccinated women are still encouraged to continue having regular pap smear tests every 3 years after the age of 25 and HPV testing after turning 30.

Practice safer sex

- Use condoms correctly and every time one has sex
- Avoid drinking excessive amounts of alcohol before or during sex, as this may impair your judgement.
- Have sex without an exchange of bodily fluids (e.g. semen or vaginal secretions).

Reach Out to Us

If you still have queries, feel free to call us at the following numbers:

HIV/STI Hotline (8am – 5pm)

1800 252 1324

Health Info Recorded Hotline (24 hours)

+65 6295 2944

Appointments

+65 6293 9648

You may also visit www.dsc-clinic.sg for more information, or find us at the DSC Clinic, 31 Kelantan Lane #01-16 S(200031).

Disclaimer

We have attempted to provide full, accurate, and up-to-date information in this patient information leaflet, based on current medical evidence and opinion. However, information and advice may vary from different sources and over time. If you have any further questions, do see your doctor or healthcare provider.

Updated **Sep 2022**.