

Genital warts

Genital warts usually appear in the genital or anal areas and are caused by a low-risk strain of human papillomavirus. They are the most common sexually-transmitted infection (STI). They do not always cause symptoms or skin lesions. Genital warts only appear in certain people. These warts may emerge in cauliflower-shaped clusters and may itch, bleed or make sex painful.

Human papillomavirus (HPV) is a large group of over 200 strains of virus. The ones that cause genital warts are different from the ones that cause mucous lesions, especially in cervical and anal mucous. This is why, in cases of cervical dysplasia, no specific tests or preventive treatment for genital warts are done. Similarly, a smear-test is not carried out before the planned schedule due to the presence of genital warts.

How do you get the infection?

It is transmitted by direct skin-to-skin sexual contact with someone that has the virus, even though they may not have any signs or symptoms. Since condoms may not cover all the infected areas, they do not give total protection. The symptoms may appear years after sexual contact, making it difficult to know when the first infection took place.

How are genital warts treated?

The treatment eliminates the warts but not the HPV infection. Our immune system will end up getting rid of the infection after a few months or years. Warts can be burnt off with treatments administered at a doctor's surgery (cryotherapy) or at home by the patients themselves (with a specific



medicated **cream** to apply to the lesions). Depending on the site of the warts and other factors, the doctor will help you to choose the right treatment for you.

If you are pregnant, you should make an appointment to see your gynaecologist or the midwife to choose the best treatment.

Once the warts have disappeared they may come back: the virus can stay in the skin for some time. You should avoid transmitting the infection by using male or female condoms.

What should my partner do?

Partners with symptoms: They should make an appointment to see the doctor to check for genital warts.

Partners without symptoms: A check-up is optional. They could benefit from a physical examination to check for genital warts and other STIs. No tests are used to detect HPV infections if there are no visible skin lesions.

What else can I do?

Stop smoking: Smoking makes HPV more resistant and makes it more difficult to get rid of the warts and the infection.

Don't shave the area: Shaving irritates the skin and makes it more vulnerable to HPV.

Rule out other associated infections: Having one STI makes it easy to catch another one. You can have a blood, urine or other type of body fluid test at the primary healthcare centre (CAP) to rule out other infections.

HPV vaccine: There is a vaccine against new strains of HPV, including the strains that cause most genital warts. Young women are given it at the age of 12 and vulnerable people until the age of 26.