

# Cryotherapy

## What is cryotherapy?

Cryotherapy is a technique used to treat superficial skin lesions with extreme cold (liquid nitrogen at  $-196^{\circ}\text{C}$ ). It freezes the lesions in a controlled way without affecting the healthy tissue.

Depending on the location and size of the lesion, it can be applied directly, with a spray, or indirectly, with a cotton swab or with tweezers. The lesion does not disappear immediately: it turns red, like a small burn, and then forms a scab which normally falls off after one or two weeks, although it may take longer, particularly if it is on the head, neck or legs.

## What is cryotherapy used for in primary healthcare?

- Viral warts
- Molluscum contagiosum
- Actinic keratosis
- Condyloma acuminatum (genital wharts)

**It is very important for the doctor to know the diagnosis of the lesion before applying cryotherapy:** after cryotherapy, lesions are



not analysed, and the type of the lesion cannot be determined. **If the healthcare professional has doubts concerning the diagnosis, cryotherapy is not suitable.**

## Procedure

In cryotherapy there is no need to use any kind of anaesthetic. The doctor applies liquid nitrogen to the lesions to be treated.

## What aftercare is needed?

Cryotherapy produces a superficial burn. You can lead a completely normal life, but you will need to apply a topical antiseptic every 12 or 24 hours for 7 to 10 days (surgical spirit, iodine or chlorhexidine), especially after bathing. If a blister reappears, go to your Primary Healthcare Centre (CAP) for treatment (often, when the blister is removed, the lesion also goes).

You should follow general guidelines for sun protection, especially for the parts of the skin where the lesions were.

## Are there any complications?

Cryotherapy usually has few side effects, and these are generally mild and well tolerated. You may have blisters, pain, swelling or, rarely, an infection or an sore. The treated area may have a lighter or darker mark, or it may lose its hair.

**The public healthcare system does not cover techniques or treatments used for cosmetic purposes.** Benign lesions are only treated in case of discomfort or complications. Examples of benign lesions that are not covered are: acrochordon (skin tag), dermatofibroma, ruby spots, freckles, age spots, liver spots, seborrheic keratoses, syringomas, xanthelasma, milium, small skin capillaries, moles, small lipomas or epidermal cysts.