

GENITAL WARTS/HPV

Infection with the human papillomavirus (HPV) is one of the most common sexually transmitted infection (STI's). HPV can cause condyloma or genital warts to appear in the genital area. HPV can also cause cell changes, especially in the female cervix, where the changes can cause an abnormal pap smear.

Genital warts are growth or bumps that appear on the external genitalia; including the penis, scrotum and thigh, or in the vagina, anus, or on the cervix. They are often flesh-colored and there may be several clustered together.

Transmission

HPV is spread primarily through direct contact during vaginal, anal or oral sex with an infected individual. It may take a few weeks to several months for the warts to appear after becoming infected. The infection can still be transmitted by infected persons who have no visible warts. For all of these reasons, it is hard to know when or from whom you got the virus.

Diagnosis

If you think you have warts or have been exposed to HPV, you should be examined by a health care provider. If you have no warts, HPV can also be detected on a routine pap smear if it has caused any changes in cervical cells.

Treatment

The warts may be removed by a variety of methods, including freezing or chemicals. The treatment may take several visits to eliminate the warts. Unfortunately, removing the warts does not necessarily mean that the HPV infection has been cured. Therefore, new warts may continue to appear.

Prevention

Not having sex is the only sure way to prevent HPV. The more people you have sex with, the greater your risk of getting HPV.

Condoms may provide protection.

If you or your partner has genital warts, you should avoid intercourse until you have finished treatment.

Special Information for Women

Cervical cancer is the most serious problem associated with HPV. It can be detected early with yearly pap smears. It is important that a pregnant woman notify her doctor if she or her partner has had HPV or genital warts.