

GENITAL WARTS

WHAT ARE GENITAL WARTS?

They are a common virus affecting the genitals of both men and women. The virus is similar to that which causes warts on hands and feet. Medicos call it Condylomata Accuminata.

WHO DO THEY FANCY?

Anyone, but some people have a high resistance to viruses, so the virus can live in the cells of the genital area without making their presence known. BUT, they can spread to someone else with less resistance to infection. This is like the Herpes virus. People on the contraceptive pill or pregnant women seem to be especially vulnerable.

HOW DO THEY SPREAD?

The virus enters the body through a tiny break in the surface layer of the skin. It can travel from person to person – often through sexual contact. It can be transferred from one part of the body to another e.g. via the hands. It is unlikely that you can ‘catch’ genital warts from toilet seats. If one sexual partner is affected, the other may not necessarily get them.

HOW LONG BEFORE THEY SHOW UP?

Usually between 1 – 4 months. Sometimes as early as 2 weeks, or as late as 8 months.

HOW DO YOU KNOW THEY ARE THERE?

Many people have genital warts but are not aware of them. Others find them very irritating, and through self-examination notice them. If you are suspicious, LOOK AND FEEL, or ask someone else to examine you.

WHAT DO THEY LOOK LIKE?

On the outside of the vagina or penis they are usually similar to hand warts, but smaller. They can fuse together to look like a cauliflower. On the inside of the vagina they are like tiny mountains with pointed heads, and rough to reel. They are usually larger inside the vagina and under the foreskin of the penis.

WHERE DO THEY APPEAR?

Anywhere in the genital area and/or around the anus, inside/outside the vagina, and can include the cervix. The virus loves to live in moist, warm surroundings.

WHAT ABOUT OTHER INFECTIONS?

Warts can be associated with other infections e.g. Thrush, Trichomonas, sometimes with Syphilis. Often there is a heavier than normal discharge with warts.

WHAT IF YOU ARE PREGNANT?

Usually the warts grow larger and spread rapidly. After delivery of the baby, they frequently become smaller and disappear.

WHAT ABOUT THE FUTURE?

Genital warts can disappear spontaneously (even overnight). 20-30% of all genital warts go within 6 months provided reinfection is prevented.

IF YOU THINK YOU HAVE “THEM” WHAT TO DO?

Seek some advice from someone who can identify the warts. Some people advise those with genital warts to have some tissue taken (biopsy) to aid the diagnosis. We cannot see any need to do this. Seek a second opinion.

IS IT NECESSARY TO SEEK TREATMENT?

Not absolutely, though it is desirable if they irritate or are associated with a vaginal discharge.

WHAT IS THE TREATMENT?

There are several depending on the size, number and area affected. A most common treatment is the use of a paint called PODOPHYLLIN. This stops the genital wart cells from dividing and multiplying in size and number. Podophyllin comes in various strengths ... it is important that any strength over 15% is NOT USED – it can seriously irritate the skin of the genital area. (Occasionally 25% is used, but under strict supervision.) Podophyllin can be absorbed through the skin. It is known to have caused harmful effects during pregnancy e.g. abnormalities of the growing baby, and death of the foetus in the womb. Be advised not to use Podophyllin at any time during

pregnancy. Tell whoever you see if you even THINK you could be pregnant.

It is easier for someone else to treat you as they can see better! If you are self- treating – **what to do?**

- Ensure you have 15% Podophyllin or less
- Only use it once a week (no more)
- Use protective cream e.g. vaseline, barrier cream, around all surrounding areas
- Apply paint with a cotton bud and only to the top of the wart
- Talcum powder may be dusted over the area to reduce irritation
- BE SURE NOT to apply the paint to any broken or bleeding area. The paint is absorbed readily

WHAT WARTS LOOK LIKE AFTER TREATMENT

They just get smaller and GO. If the warts are not responding, you may be advised/referred to a specialist or hospital. Here you may be advised to have either a general anaesthetic or local (epidural) anaesthetic in order for the warts to be removed by cauterization (burning off) or cryotherapy (freezing off).

HOW DO YOU RELIEVE DISCOMFORT?

If urination causes discomfort or pain due to warts being close to the opening of the urethra:

- Sit in a warm bath and urinate. This is very soothing.
- Drink plenty of fluids (eg fruit juice, water) this dilutes the urine and therefore relieves the irritation.

HOW DO YOU STOP FUTURE VISITORS?

- Good health, well balanced diet, good personal hygiene, exercise
- Self examination regularly
- Avoid medicated soaps and ‘vaginal deodorant sprays’
- Seek help if concerned by itchiness or unusual discharge
- Refrain from sexual contact during the time you have the warts and/or are treating them
- Avoid moisture retaining clothes eg nylon undies
- Be aware that the more sexual partners you have the higher the risk of developing genital warts. The use of condoms may protect.

For more information.....

- please call our Client Information & Support Service 8948-0144
- or NT HEALTH INFO LINE 1800 186 026
- or visit www.fpahealth.org.au

Family Planning Welfare Association of NT

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Admin/ Clinics/ Pamphlets_Info/ Genital Warts
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MISSION STATEMENT

Family Planning Welfare Association of the NT exists to provide quality health care and education services in sexual and reproductive health.