

WARTS (HUMAN PAPILLOMAVIRUS)

What are warts?

Warts are small, non-cancerous growths on the skin caused by the human papillomavirus (HPV). They can appear on the hands, feet, face or genitals. There are over 200 types of HPV, and different types cause different kinds of warts.

Most warts go away on their own, but some can last for months or even years. Warts are common and can come back after treatment. Some types of HPV can also cause genital warts and cancers, such as cervical, anal and throat cancers.

What are the symptoms of warts?

HPV is very common. Most people will get it at some point in their lives, usually without knowing it. It's most often spread through sexual contact, but some types can spread through skin-to-skin contact.

Type	Signs and Symptoms
Common Warts	Rough, dome-shaped bumps usually on hands and fingers. They are painless unless irritated
Plantar Warts	Flat with black dots found on soles of feet and can be painful when walking
Filiform Warts	Thread-like growths, often near eyelids or lips
Flat Warts	Small, smooth, flesh-coloured and often appear in groups on face, arms or legs
Genital Warts	Small bumps or skin tags in genital or anal area. May itch, bleed or cause pain during sex - often no symptoms

Public Health

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How do warts spread?

HPV spreads through:

- Direct skin contact with a wart
- Touching contaminated surfaces, like shower floors or towels
- Sexual contact, including vaginal, anal and oral sex
- Childbirth (rare)

Symptoms may take weeks, months or even years to appear after infection.

How can warts be prevented?

- Get vaccinated. The HPV vaccine protects against the most common types of HPV that cause genital warts and cancers
- Avoid direct contact with warts
- Use protection, like condoms, during sex—though they don't cover all skin
- Wear footwear in public showers, saunas or locker rooms

How are warts treated?

Most warts go away without treatment, but options include:

- Over-the-counter treatments, such as salicylic acid
- Freezing (cryotherapy) or burning (electrocautery)
- Laser therapy or minor surgery
- Prescription creams for genital warts

See a doctor if:

- Warts are painful, spreading or located on the face or genitals
- You are unsure if it's a wart
- You are pregnant or immunocompromised